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7 SONGS

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**'If you look at the traditional songs he recorded, they've all got a very strong harmonic structure. Bert Jansch was definitely a man for harmony and harmonic structures!'**

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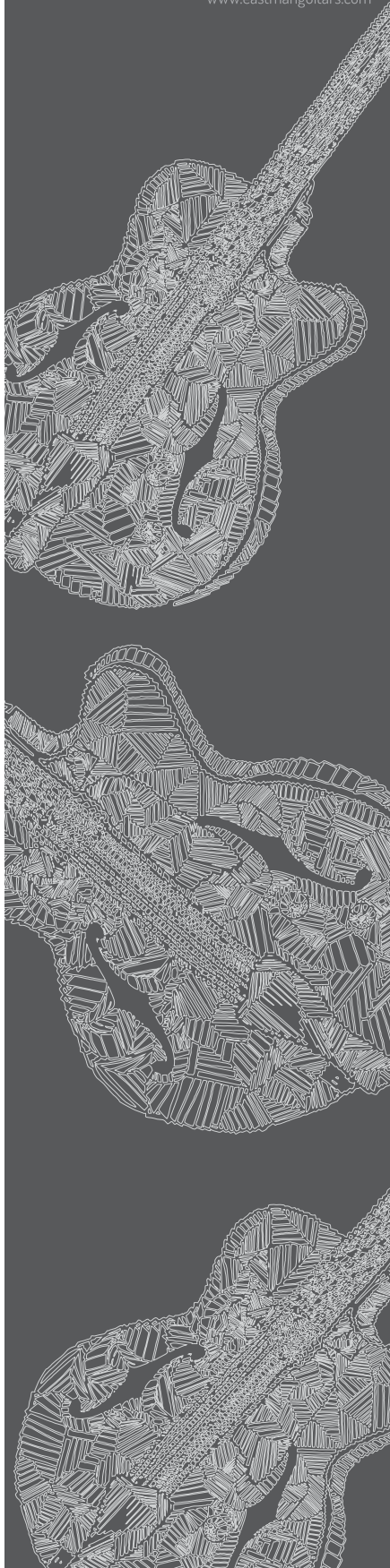
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Molly Tuttle

**Photographer**

Andy Cambria





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## Video Exclusives



**CHATHAM COUNTY LINE** Watch this modern bluegrass band, whose guitarist Dave Wilson is featured on p. 30, perform roots-influenced, story-driven songs on a new *Acoustic Guitar Sessions* episode.



### WINTER NAMM 2017

Courtney Hartman (see p. 30) and more demo new gear.



### NEED FOR SPEED

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### MOLLY TUTTLE

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JOEY LUSTERMAN

**Y**ou've probably read plenty over the years in these pages about the NAMM show—that's the sprawling National Association of Music Merchants bi-annual trade expo held in the wintertime at the Anaheim Convention Center, right across the street from Disneyland (the summer rendition is held in Nashville).

It's a blockbuster, to be sure.

This year, in the third week of January, 100,000 souls filled the cavernous halls to exhibit or admire new products from hundreds of manufacturers, including such big-name companies as C.F. Martin & Co., Taylor Guitars, Gibson Guitars, Fender Guitars, Guild Guitars, Bedell Guitars, Cordoba Guitars, Breedlove Guitars, Ovation Guitars, Washburn Guitars, and Dean/Luna, among others.

L.R. Baggs debuted the Synapse, an impressive horn-loaded solo PA system. And Fishman had an equally impressive expandable PA system of its own.

You can find a summary of some of the many "affordable" guitars, most under \$600, displayed at Winter NAMM in the Beat on page 14. I spotlighted these because it's increasingly clear that the quality of production guitars is still on the rise, with torrefied tops and choice electronics finding their way onto affordable models, some priced as low as \$149. Videos of a selection of those budget beauties, as well as

some of NAMM's more high-end offerings, can be found on our website (AcousticGuitar.com).

Throughout 2017, AG will be reviewing many of the new guitars, amps, and other gear.

One new feature at NAMM this year was the Boutique Guitar Showcase. It was composed of several booths on the main floor with invited, custom luthiers exhibiting free of charge (the showcase was devoted to both acoustic and electric guitars). The display-spotlighted handmade, acoustic guitars by such acclaimed custom builders as Jason Kostal, Isaac Jang, Michihiro Marsuda, and Steve Klein, among others. It's likely NAMM was influenced by custom-guitar shows in Woodstock, Santa Barbara, Memphis, and elsewhere.

Amid the sea of manufactured goods, interest in those hand-built guitars was high—one custom builder was told by a NAMM official that the Boutique Guitar Showcase web page accounted for 45 percent of the traffic to the NAMM site.

Overall, I was knocked out by several new products. I came away from Winter NAMM 2017 impressed by the state of the industry. As always, it was a joy to reconnect with so many amazing people that dedicate themselves so tirelessly to innovation in the guitar trade.

Play on.

—Greg Cahill



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14

**The Beat**  
Good deals dominate  
Winter NAMM 2017

14

**The Beat**  
Inside Taylor's new  
factory in Mexico

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**5 Minutes with . . .**  
British folk-pop  
artist Katie Melua

# SETUP



**GUITAR TALK**

JAMES ST. LAURENT

## Keeping It Simple

Canadian guitarist Adam Karch prefers a no-fuss approach

BY ANDY HUGHES

As a Canadian musician born and raised in Quebec, it's appropriate that **Adam Karch** joined the large contingent of acoustic blues musicians playing at the 2016 Montreal Jazz Festival. Before his performance, Karch took time to reflect on his distinctive percussive style and no-fuss approach to recording. His latest album is *Moving Forward*.

"I was one of five kids, and I had two older brothers, and they were always in bands, and they used to practice in the barn playing rock 'n' roll songs," he says, "and I used to look at what they were playing, and how they were playing it. The first chord I learned was A

minor; the first song I learned was "Angie" by the **Rolling Stones**. I realized pretty quickly that the chords were backwards for me because I'm a leftie, so my dad bought me a left-handed guitar and I picked up on the Stones, and just worked backwards from there."

**How did you evolve your fingerstyle playing?**

That came from listening to **Doc Watson** and **Chet Atkins**. I realized that I couldn't take to fingerpicks at all, three picks was really not comfortable for me—I always preferred to feel the strings with the skin of my thumb and fingers. With the index and middle fingers, I

can do Chet Atkins and **Jimmy Reed** stuff, **Kelly Joe Phelps** and **Merle Travis**. I loved '50s rockabilly, too—**Scotty Moore** was a big favorite growing up. It's about physical feel for me—you develop a relationship with the strings based on touch and everything just falls into place. Using picks meant I had to move my fingers around far more than was right for me. If you use your right hand as a chord holder, it doesn't need to move very much—you can sound like a one-man-band! People think the sound is more complicated to make than it really is. When you get fingerpicking down you can make a lot of stuff happen. I can hold one



chord for 20 minutes, and just work around it. When I tried to play with picks, to get the boom-chicka-boom going, the reach over the fourth and sixth strings just felt too far, and I felt like I couldn't play the guitar at all!

#### How did the percussive element develop?

That I got from **Tommy Emmanuel**, who is a fine player. I realized that you can hit a percussive beat on the guitar on the one-and-two, you can hit the guitar in all kinds of places, and not lose the chord. You can get a conga-drum sound from the bottom of the guitar, and a bass drum on the top. If you don't damp or release the chord as you hit the guitar, you keep that constant sound going.

#### Was that a eureka moment for you as a player?

It was, yeah. I figured that the mic inside the guitar was picking up the movement of air from inside the guitar body, and everywhere I struck the body, I got a different sound. Then it was just a matter of working out what worked best. It's more effective when I play solo.

**When you get fingerpicking down you can make a lot of stuff happen. I can hold one chord for 20 minutes, and just work around it.**

#### Do you use any effects?

I have a top-line Seymour Duncan Mag Mic that picks up the percussive tones well. I go straight into the desk from there, no effects. I play like [hill country bluesman] R.L. Burnside—I really dig in, very hillbilly, and I like a purity of sound. Every soundman I work with really likes the sound of my guitar. I have nothing against pedals, loads of my friends use them, but I just like to play straight and I don't need loads of volume, and a good sound engineer will get the sound I need in the room.

#### What has been the difference in the way you recorded *Cotton Fields* from the methods used for your previous records?

It is far more organic in terms of the tones, and the production. My first album was recorded using Pro Tools, but that 2011 album was recorded on analog tape. We took a lot of time to make sure we got all the nuances of the sound recorded correctly—we had five separate mics on the guitar to pick up that dry wood sound. It's all about fingers and callouses!

Before that, I think I was making records to please everyone else, and not really thinking about what pleased me. So this time, I did it how I wanted it. If I sang a little flat here and there, we left it, we didn't do take after take. If I hadn't gotten something after five or six takes, we'd leave it and come back the next day—no point fighting it. I sang "Night Moves," the **Bob Seger** number, and I didn't put the bridge in. There is actually a Spoonerism in the record: I swapped the first letters on two words, but again, I left that in there,

because it's real. I wanted the record to feel how I feel when I play live. Sometimes I just get lost and forget where I am, which is wonderful onstage, and now I have that feeling on a record.

#### Is that a blueprint for future recordings?

I think it is, yeah. I am going to record on tape, and keep things nice and simple, no forcing. If you force it, it doesn't come, so you lose. Good, simple, country-hobo blues. That's what I am going to do.

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Nearly 100,000 music pros  
attended Winter NAMM



JOEY LUSTERMAN

# Affordable & Innovative Ruled Winter NAMM

Manufacturers move to attract budget-conscious buyers

BY GREG CAHILL

The biggest news from the Winter 2017 installment of the **NAMM Show**? The influx of affordable production guitars, including many under \$500, loaded with solid tonewoods, torrefied tops, and choice electronics. You know something's going on in the guitar trade when these coveted appointments—including Adirondack spruce tops—until recently reserved mostly for high-end axes, are becoming commonplace.

Affordability and technology were two overarching themes at the massive musical-instrument trade show, held January 18–22 at the Anaheim Convention Center in Southern California, and attracting nearly 100,000 manufacturers, dealers, distributors, and artists.

**Taylor Guitars**, known for its impeccably constructed high-end instruments, introduced its beginner- and budget-friendly **Academy series**.

“We wanted to give the first-time buyer a quality, affordable instrument,” says Taylor Guitar master luthier **Andy Powers**. “One that enriches their experience, that has the playable neck for which Taylor is known, and makes them want to stick with guitar as they are learning.” The Academy series includes the **Dreadnought Academy 10e** (\$798 MSRP), **Grand Concert Academy 12e** (\$798 MSRP), and **Grand Concert Academy 12e-N** (\$858 MSRP).

**Recording King**, which has led the market in such budget-priced guitars as the **Dirty-30** and **EZ Tone** series, returned with the new **EZ Tone Grand-Auditorium** (\$449 MSRP), and three new **Dirty 30 Series 7** single-0 models, while **Gretsch** added several models to its popular **Roots Collection**, including the **G9511 Style 1, Single-0 Parlor** (\$499 MSRP).

**Michael Kelly** debuted the dramatic **Forte**

**Exotic** (\$299.99 MAP) and the striking **3-D Grand Auditorium** (\$449.99 MAP)—a cutaway with a solid-spruce top that has been torrefied. This treatment technique accelerates the wood's natural aging process through a combination of heat and special environmental controls.

Other models that fit the trend include **Dean's DE QMAH** (\$449 street) and **St. Augustine Mini Jumbo SAMJE SN** (\$499 street); **Luna's Art V Folk** (\$249 street); **Ibanez's AEW-C13BCOPN** (\$599.99 MSRP); **Fender's PM-3 All-Mahogany NE Triple-0, Natural** (\$599 MSRP) and **PM-2 All-Mahogany NE Parlor, Natural** (\$599 MSRP).

And that's just one development glimpsed at Winter NAMM 2017. Head to [AcousticGuitar.com/Category/News](http://AcousticGuitar.com/Category/News) for individual blog posts on all the new stuff at NAMM, from **Martin's** ornate **D-200 Deluxe**, which retails for \$149,999, to the **G7th Ultralight Capo**, a pocket-ready capo constructed of composites that sells for just \$12.99.

## INSIDE TAYLOR'S NEW TECATE, MEXICO, FACTORY

Immediately following Winter NAMM, **Taylor Guitars** invited a group of journalists and colleagues to tour its new factory in Tecate, Mexico, which has been in full production for a little over a year and is building the company's new **Academy series**. The sister factory to Taylor's El Cajon, California, headquarters, the two facilities are about an hour apart by car and master luthier **Andy Powers** says he and other employees regularly go back-and-forth during the work day.

Indeed, Powers—who served as tour guide—knew the passport-stamping official at the Mexico checkpoint of the Tecate Port of Entry by name and purchased a homemade chipotle hot sauce from him. Taylor's director of production **Patrick Wilson**, who oversees both the El Cajon and Tecate factories, also joined the tour.

The new 116,000-square-foot Tecate factory produces all of Taylor's laminate-wood guitars, while solid-wood guitars are crafted in El Cajon. The Tecate factory houses the majority of Taylor's wood supply as well as a full production line for its cases and gig bags. Powers said that while some materials come from China—for example, the burgundy crushed velvet that lines the inside of Taylor's hard shell cases—the company does not have any manufacturing in China.

Powers kicked off the tour by explaining Taylor's approach to wood processing, which is done in Tecate with sustainability in mind. “We use all the materials from a tree and repair small imperfections,” says Powers,

showing off a stack of domestic Walnut that will be used to layer the back and sides of its **100 Series** and **GS Mini-e**, replacing layered rosewood after the Convention on the Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) sanctioned new trade restrictions on all species of rosewood starting January 2.

From there, Powers provided an in-depth look at every stage of guitar building, from bending the sides to gluing to bracing, sharing that it takes an average 2.5 hours to build one guitar in a process that combines hand and machine work.

Scattered and hung throughout the corridors of the factory are large framed photos of each employee with his/her name and tenure at the factory. Wilson said Taylor employs 800–900 people between its Tecate and El Cajon locations. “When the company was smaller—a few hundred people—**Bob Taylor** knew everyone’s name. Now we have the photos to help us keep track,” Wilson says. Later, at dinner back in San Diego, Taylor says the photos help him maintain his favorite “party trick”—remembering people’s names.

—Whitney Phaneuf

## D’ADDARIO KICKS OFF EARTH DAY EVENTS

Did you know you can’t recycle musical-instrument strings through municipal recycling programs, due to the metals and alloys they contain? That means more than 1.5 million pounds of instrument string metal are added to landfills each year.

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—Anna Pulley

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# A Delicate Touch

**Katie Melua finds unlimited potential in a minimalist approach to acoustic guitar**

BY ANDY HUGHES

**H**er birth name is **Ketevan Melua**, and she was born in Georgia, a tiny country of less than four million people bordered by Turkey and Russia. Now based in the United Kingdom, **Katie Melua**—whose work has appeared in **Quentin Tarantino's** *Grindhouse* and elsewhere—took some time during her recent UK tour to chat about using all the strings on her guitars, her dislike of plectrums, and working with Tarantino.

## Are you an acoustic-guitar geek?

Absolutely not. What I am fascinated about with the acoustic guitar is that it can be absolutely anything you want it to be. When you think of all the different types and styles of guitarist there have been, and I am talking just about acoustic guitarists, playing so many different styles and using the guitar to convey what they want in so many different ways. Compare someone like **JJ Cale** with **Nick Drake**—the difference is huge. Then you have

someone like **Ed Sheeran**, different again—the variety is there. I do like to get quite intimate with my guitar, in terms of string-plucking when I play. I enjoy that connection to it, and I like to totally inhabit the world of the song I am making.

**I really believe in using the minimum possible in the creative process. For me, the smaller my palette, the better my work becomes.**

**KATIE MELUA**

## You are not well known in America.

Certainly nothing like as much as I am known in Europe, although I do have a fan base in Canada. There are no plans to “break” America as they say, not right now. My previous management team was all about conquering the world

and going higher and higher. But now, I feel I am in a very different environment. It's not just about gaining new audiences or conquering territories, it's about how I can grow as a musician. If there is a decision about breaking into a new area like America, I think that is their area rather than mine. My job is to make music, and make it as good as I possibly can. I did a radio interview for a program called *All Things Considered*, which airs on NPR, and that went really well, so hopefully that may generate some interest. We will have to see.

I have been in a film that American audiences may have seen; it's a Quentin Tarantino film called *Grindhouse*. The film is an homage to B-movie horror films, and it's two films separated by trailers for fictitious films, and I am in one of those trailers, called *Don't*. I love Tarantino, and I adore horror films, so that was great to do. It isn't going to connect people to my music, but it was a great crazy fun day out.

I think if my music appeals, then the contact will come in. I have a huge respect for American audiences, and I am sure that when the time is right, we will make a connection again.

**I've read that you are studying Bob Dylan, for the guitars and for the rhyming.**

Yes, I am, not so much for the guitar work, yet, but for the lyrics and the song structures certainly.

**You've been known just to use one or two strings on your guitar when you play. Are you using more now?**

I still love my minimalist approach, and I really believe in using the minimum possible in the creative process. For me, the smaller my palette, the better my work becomes. That applies to guitars, but it applies outside there as well. So I do use all six strings when I play, but I do still like my minimalism.

**What do you feel is the difference between nylon and steel strings, because you use both.**

It's a different universe. Nylon strings I find are great for plucking because they have a more

bass-like tone and quality to them. The steel strings are more about strumming. The sound of steel strings has a brighter, more immediate sound, and I like that for the faster songs that need some guitar power behind them.

**Have you gotten past your dislike of plectrums?**

No, I never have, I do not get on with plectrums at all. I still like to play with the skin on my fingers. I don't use acrylic nails, and I don't grow my nails long because the skin contact gives me a nice woody, muddy string sound that I really like. I don't like it when the string sound becomes more high-ended, which it does with plectrums or nails. I have tried acrylic nails and I have grown my own nails, but I still prefer the skin contact because it adds that bass feeling into the sound, which I like.

For me, issues with playing the guitar are not connected to my nails—I honestly believe that all musicians play with their minds and hearts more than with their hands. I do have trouble as a woman playing the guitar because I find it a very masculine instrument. My way of



working around that, since I have been learning more technical aspects of my guitar playing, has been to imagine needlework. I know this is abstract thinking, so just bear with me: When I find a particular technical aspect of playing that I am struggling with, I imagine that I am working on some very fine and delicate sewing, and that is the technique I am picking up, and that does work for me.

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**Ann Savoy is a driving force in Louisiana's regional folk scene and the matriarch of a kick-ass musical dynasty**

**BY KENNY BERKOWITZ**

**O**n a different night, Ann Savoy might be playing button accordion with the Magnolia Sisters, singing jazz standards with Ann Savoy & Her Sleepless Knights, or strumming guitar with powerhouse fiddler Michael Doucet in the Savoy-Doucet Cajun Band. She might be working on the second volume of *Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People*, 31 years after publishing the first, or on a new episode of her radio program *Duet*, where she and Linda Ronstadt share their love for musical families, or on the backlog of negatives waiting in her darkroom.

sitting in on lead guitar for the first time. Standing at Marc's left, Ann is the one holding it all together, playing what Ronstadt calls "slammin' rhythm guitar" with a handful of perfectly timed, boom-chick barre chords that provide all the drive this music needs.

"It looks simple, but it's not," says Ann, talking after the show. "It's '60s dancehall guitar style, where there's a boom and then a lot of dampening, like a snare drum and a bass drum, which are the sounds it's trying to create. The accent is on the first beat, and it's all barre chords, because you're always dampening strings. Always. Up and down the neck. Basically, you just use the bottom three strings, and that's how you get your Cajun sound."

Marc adds, "It doesn't come easy, because you've got a different beat to accent." He picked up accordion at age 12 and is still unmatched at 76. "In Cajun music, the rhythm-guitar player is the timing chain for

Clifton Chenier and Cléoma Falcon. Marc asked her to dance, saying, "You've got as many freckles as a turkey egg," which doesn't sound any better in French than it does in English, but it worked.

At the time, Ann was playing country-blues guitar, taking inspiration from Memphis Minnie (1897–1973) and Bessie Smith (1894–1937). All that changed when she moved from Richmond, Virginia, to Eunice and Marc asked her to sing the songs he'd known since he was a child. She took a quick lesson in Cajun guitar and they started playing around the house, with Marc on accordion and Ann on rhythm, sounding a lot like their most recent self-released album, *Back to the Basics II: Il Faut Que Ça Va*.

"I was a pretty high-tech guitar player, playing those funky country-blues girls, and I was studying jazz chords, learning to play Django-y guitar," says Ann, who has been fluent in French since she was 13. "Then, when I learned Cajun guitar, I had to leave all that behind, not to lose

**MAMA**

She might be in Eunice, Louisiana, playing music in her living room with her husband, Marc, and their four children—Sarah, Joel, Wilson, and Gabrielle—plus any friends and neighbors who happen to visit. But on this one moonlit July night in 2016, she's 1,500 miles away from home, playing guitar with the Savoy Family Cajun Band at the Finger Lakes GrassRoots Festival, in upstate New York, where a crowd has gathered in the dance tent for a set of two-steps, blues, and waltzes.

Marc sits center stage, switching between a pair of his own hand-built Acadian accordions and shouting encouragement to the dancers. To his right, Wilson pounds out a Cajun version of barrelhouse piano, while fiddler Joel calls out changes to his friend Chas Justus, who's

the whole band, and if the timing chain is not right, the motor won't run. If I don't have a good rhythm-guitar player, my fingers won't do what I tell them. They'll start balking like an old mule. Over the last 60 years, I've heard a whole bunch of people who can play a whole bunch of notes, but very few people can play Cajun rhythm. I could probably name, well, all of them on the fingers of my right hand.

"And Ann is one."

The only member of the band born outside the culture, Ann has been playing Cajun music since 1976, when she and Marc fell in love at the National Folk Festival in Greensboro, North Carolina. He was there to give a workshop on accordion; she was there to hear the Balfa Brothers, after finding some Arhoolie records featuring

those skills, but to put them aside, to simplify, to focus more on the groove than on the technical aspects of guitar playing. I can still fingerpick and play jazz chords, but for Cajun music, I don't need any of that. I can just hit on one chord the whole song, and it can work, if it's loud enough to cut through everything else."

**'In Cajun music, the rhythm-guitar player is the timing chain for the whole band, and if the timing chain is not right, the motor won't run!'**

**MARC SAVOY**



Like Marc, she loved listening to the older generation, hearing people talk about their lives. That led to the interviews and photographs that became *Cajun Music*, the definitive book on the region's folk life, begun shortly after she arrived. With baby Sarah in tow—she was born in 1978—Ann began traveling through the countryside, digging up the history beneath the songs and discovering new tunes to bring back home. Over time, she became Cajun music's ambassador to the world, releasing more than 20 albums, writing a chapter in *Rolling Stone's American Roots Music* (2001), producing a pair of cross-over tribute albums, *Evangeline Made* (2002) and *Creole Bred* (2004), and appearing with her son Joel in the film *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (2002).

**T**here's a Ronstadt joke that Ann gave birth to her band, and it's not far from the truth. The children were listening to accordion and guitar while they were in the womb, and Cajun culture continues to define them as a family. Sarah, who works as a chef in Paris, plays accordion, guitar, piano, and washboard in the Franco-Cajun Sarah Savoy's Hell Raising Hayride. Joel has been producing and recording Louisiana music for the last 20 years, earning a Grammy and two Fiddler of the Year



**'Before we got married, Marc asked, "Would you like an engagement ring or a really amazing guitar?" And I said I'd much rather have an amazing guitar.'**

ANN SAVOY

awards from the Cajun French Music Association; after founding the Red Stick Ramblers with Justus, he now plays Cajun traditional

music with accordionist Jesse Lége and Cajun-country duets with his wife, songwriting multi-instrumentalist Kelli Jones-Savoy.

Wilson, the third-born, plays accordion and fiddle in the Grammy-winning ensemble the Band Courtbouillon with Wayne Touns and Steve Riley, plus tours the world with the Pine Leaf Boys and teaches accordion and Cajun ensemble at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. The youngest, Gabrielle, who focuses on visual art and photography, also plays guitar. At a pair of West Coast gigs this past summer, all six Savoyes shared a stage for the first time.

"Everybody in our band has a very distinct personality, and each of us brings our own particular strengths," Ann says. "Marc's is authenticity. He played the dancehalls for years as a young man; he defines the Cajun sound. He's our source. We're his band. Joel listens to a lot of archival material, so he'll bring elements from the Swing Era in Louisiana, like Harry Choates and some old, rare gems. Wilson has this vintage rock 'n' roll feel—at ten years old, he was really into Louisiana piano styles. He could barely talk, but he could play Jerry Lee Lewis-style piano, and play so hard he broke the strings. The kids grew up coloring at the feet of [Cajun legends] Dennis McGee, Dewey Balfa, and Wayne Fruge, absorbing these sounds into their brain cells. It was the music

## WHAT ANN SAVOY PLAYS

These days, Ann Savoy relies on two acoustic guitars: a custom 1977 Martin flattop, for playing at sit-down concerts, and a 1953 Gretsch archtop, for dances. "I believe the Gretsch belonged to Muddy Waters, because the names of the band are autographed on the pickguard with a penknife," Savoy says. "It sounds like a Louisiana dancehall back in the 1950s or '60s. It has this certain sound about it that's very warm—a warm electric sound, not a plastic electric sound. It cuts through a lot, and it's very easy on the hands.

"Then I have a Martin parlor guitar that's all inlaid with abalone," she adds. "It's like a little work of art, it's so beautiful. It's my girl guitar, it's so pretty, and has a very woody sound. Before we got married, Marc asked, 'Would you like an engagement ring or a really amazing guitar?' And I said I'd much rather have an amazing guitar. So he sent a picture of Cléoma Falcon's guitar to Martin, and they made one just like it. It's the most exquisite guitar. It really is. And holding it is like wearing beautiful jewelry."



GABRIELLE SAVOY

**‘A friend of mine once said, “You’re the most egoless guitar player I’ve ever met,” Ann says. “It’s not about me, it’s about how I fit into the band and how I can make them happy!’**

**ANN SAVOY**

of their lives, it was what they heard, and by the time they had instruments in their hands, around ten or 12, they could tear it up.”

They still can.

On this night at the Finger Lakes Grassroots Festival, the dancers are young and old, drifting into the tent after listening to bluegrass by Ricky Skaggs, gospel by the Flying Clouds, Afrobeat by Orlando Julius, and Venezuelan folk-pop by Jesus Hidalgo. There’s a dancer pumping soap bubbles into the crowd, with bubbles floating across the stage, from Ann to Marc to Joel to Chas, who came for a couple of songs and wound up staying for the whole night. By the close of the set, with Doug Kershaw’s “Diggy Liggy Lo,” it’s almost midnight, with only a few hours of sleep before the First Family of Cajun Music drives 300 more miles to reach the Newport Folk Festival.

**F**or Ann, there’s no shortage of things to do next: She’s looking forward to making an all-French jazz album with Her Sleepless Knights; a folk album with the Magnolia Sisters, her band with Anya Burgess, Lisa Trahan, and Jane Vidrine; and a solo album in English, using the same approach she used on *Adieu False Heart*, her 2006 duet album with Ronstadt. There are old interviews that need to be transcribed and old photographs that need to be printed. There are jam sessions at the Savoy Music Center, in Eunice, Louisiana, the store that Marc has been running for 50 years, and more time to spend with family, doing what they’d be doing onstage, but without an audience.

“A friend of mine once said, ‘You’re the most egoless guitar player I’ve ever met,’” Ann says. “It’s not about me, it’s about how I fit into the band and how I can make them happy. I try to do that by making sure I’m relaxed, that I’m listening very carefully, and that I’m there to support them. It takes a lot of physical strength, because some of these songs go on for eight minutes, followed by another eight-minute song and another eight-minute song. You can’t speed up, you can’t slow down. The rhythm has to remain absolutely perfect, and to do that, you need stamina.

“You have to be strong.”

**AC**



COURTESY OF SAVOY FAMILY BAND

## HOW TO BUILD A FAMILY BAND

The trick to starting a family band, say Marc and Ann Savoy, is not to try. “When the kids were coming up, we had a bunch of instruments in a ring around the house: fiddles, accordions, guitars,” says Marc, who plays them all, as well as being the world’s foremost builder of Cajun accordions. “The first time [sons] Joel and Wilson expressed an interest, I said, ‘You can play my fiddle, but don’t ever ask me to show you anything, because I won’t.’ And I did that for one simple reason. When I was a kid, I had such a desire, such a passion for this music and these people that played it. I would have figured out how to play if someone had put me in a straightjacket, and I wanted the kids to have the same passion for it. Because you’ll never amount to a hill of beans if you don’t.”

“We didn’t teach them anything,” Ann says. “They learned by osmosis, by watching and listening. I remember once, I tried to show Joel a little bit of Cajun fiddle when he was young, and in about five minutes, he was better than me. After that, we played together a while, and then he just took off on his own. That was it.”

It worked, and all these years later, there’s little conflict in the band. Marc likes to stick to the traditional dancehall repertoire, so that’s generally what they do. Ann and Joel like to organize their music into set lists; Marc and Wilson would rather just play whatever feels right at the time. They’re all equals, with each member giving the others the freedom they need, and for each of them, there’s very little difference between jamming at home and performing onstage. “I don’t get any more enjoyment playing for an audience of 2,000 than just playing for two people in my kitchen,” Marc says. “I don’t do anything different than I’d be doing at home. I’m not an audience-type person, I’m only playing for the joy it brings me. When I’m onstage with my family, I look to my right and see my two sons, and I look to my left, my wife is there. That’s the ultimate. I’ve done a lot of things in my life, and some of them were rewarding and some were the opposite of rewarding. If I could go back and change those things, I would. Nothing I could have done in my life would ever bring the satisfaction, the joy that comes from playing music with my family.”





# THE BERT JAN

**A tribute to the atypical Scottish folk fingerstylist 50 years after the release of 'Blackwaterside,' a song so sweet Led Zeppelin's Jimmy Page made it his own**

**BY STEVE BOISSON**

**"S**trolling down the highway, I'm going to get there my way"—prophetic words, the opening lines of the first track on Bert Jansch's 1965 self-titled debut album. The legendary Scottish musician, who died five years ago last October at age 67, sojourned through the pits and pinnacles of music-making guided by his own compass, largely disinterested in popular trends.

He soaked up many musical veins—blues, jazz, ragas, folk, and the traditional tunes of Britain and Ireland—yet he always transformed those styles to suit his own. Listen to "Strolling Down the Highway"—it's a blues, but the bending bass line and rolling hammer-ons are

distinctly Jansch. That first album made him a headliner on the British folk circuit, but he was never a typical folkie. Low on the raconteur scale, he was nonetheless riveting onstage, intense with a dark, romantic allure. Jansch became a world-traveling concert draw as a member of Pentangle, the landmark acoustic ensemble that mined folk, traditional, jazz, and other elements (and that also featured guitarist John Renbourn), but he never gained the commercial success of contemporary admirers such as Neil Young, Paul Simon, or Jimmy Page. Nevertheless, the Led Zeppelin guitarist was so impressed he recorded Jansch's version of the tradition "Blackwaterside" on the first Zeppelin

album, renaming it "Black Mountain Side." (Al Stewart has said that he taught Page how to play the folk song in D A D G A D.)

"The only three people that I've ever copied were Big Bill Broonzy, Davey Graham, and Archie Fisher," Jansch once remarked.

One of those three begs to differ.

"He didn't really copy," recalls Fisher, a popular Scottish folk musician who gave the young Jansch a few lessons at the Howff, a seminal Edinburgh folk club. "He never exactly played what I played. What he used to do was absorb things, get the sense of what I was trying to. He could pick up guitar just by watching other people. It was quite remarkable."



MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY IMAGES

# JANSCH LEGACY

**H**erbert Jansch originally planned to become a gardener. In 1960, the year he discovered the Howff, he signed on as an apprentice nurseryman. But guitars soon proved more fetching than hoes and hand-pruners, so the 16-year-old Jansch moved into the Howff, where he did odd jobs and taught guitar lessons. This was his university, and the blues players, traditional singers, and folkies who passed through the door became his teachers. Upon leaving the bosom of the Howff, Jansch tested his talent on the road, playing small clubs throughout the Scottish lowlands and Northern England. His early repertoire was steeped in blues, along with a few originals. He hadn't sung much at the Howff, but in the years on the road he developed a sometimes snarling, entrancing vocal style that danced around the quirky rhythms of his guitar. By 1964, though his life was unstable, bouncing between crash

pads in Edinburgh and London, the stage magic of Bert Jansch fell firmly in place.

One of his earliest advocates was traditional singer Anne Briggs. A fiery, beautiful woman, she and Jansch had bonded during his trip to London the previous year. Now that he was back, she persuaded recording engineer Bill Leader to make a Bert Jansch album. Along with Briggs' critically acclaimed recordings, Leader had recorded the groundbreaking *Folk Routes*, *New Routes* with traditionalist Shirley Collins and jazzman Davey Graham. Over a few sessions, Leader recorded Jansch, playing borrowed guitars, in Leader's Camden flat. He played the recording master for Nat Joseph, founder of Transatlantic Records, which had started with sex-education discs and had of late branched into folk. Joseph agreed to release it for a flat hundred pounds. Sensing it ran a little short, Joseph later requested three more tracks,

from which Jansch would receive mechanical royalties. In all, Transatlantic made a sweet deal on an album that would sell 150,000 copies over the next decade.

*Bert Jansch* demonstrated his versatility as a songwriter and guitarist. "Needle of Death," a sympathetic lament for a heroin addict, induced substantial commentary. On "Oh, How Your Love Is Strong," a man confronts the woman who recently gave birth to his son. "Would it be a crime, to leave at such a time, when you've plenty claims to make on me?"—questions Jansch himself would later pose. "Courting Blues" and "Dreams of Love" are more sweetly romantic. Instrumentals such as "Alice's Wonderland," with its jazz inflections, and "Casbah," with its Middle-Eastern flavor, show Jansch stepping toward—certainly not over—Davey Graham territory. He achieves equal footing with the fingerstyle master on





JAC. DE NUIS / ANEFO

**Low on the raconteur scale, Jansch was nonetheless riveting onstage, intense with a dark, romantic allure.**

“Anji,” Graham’s underground classic, which Jansch customizes with extended resolves, flailed strings, and a sampling of Nat Adderly’s soul-jazzy “Work Song.”

1966’s *Jack Orion* would also drop jaws throughout the folk scene. With the exception of Ewan MacColl’s “The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face,” all the tunes are traditional. The most gripping is “Blackwaterside,” an old Irish song about a girl who gives up her virtue to a scamp. Anne Briggs had taught it to Jansch, who worked out a fingerstyle arrangement that did not rely on the three-chord folk strumming that Briggs abhorred, at least when applied to traditional music. Jansch’s fingerpicking follows the mood changes in the song (see “Blackwaterside,” p. 68). He recorded the song in drop-D tuning. The verse structure opens sweetly, following the melody, which takes a jagged turn with a

few quick, fevered upstrokes, and then resolves with a hypnotic, rolling descend to the bottom D. Excepting “The Waggoner’s Lad,” which he plays on banjo, all the songs on *Jack Orion* are in the modal-friendly tunings of drop-D and D A D G A D.

Throughout his career, Jansch’s guitar accompaniment ranged from simple picking patterns to complex, rigorously crafted arrangements that traveled up and down the fretboard. The traditional “Reynardine,” from 1971’s *Rosemary Lane*, epitomizes this near-classical approach. It’s a beautifully crafted piece that chases a cascade of hammer-ons off of barre chords and open strings. A G string bent down against the ring of an open D is one of many mood enhancers. “If you look at the traditional songs he recorded, they’ve all got a very strong harmonic structure, like ‘Reynardine,’” Fisher says. “He was definitely a man for harmony and harmonic structures.”

**J**ansch never called himself a traditional musician—blues licks often tainted the purity of his renditions—but the old songs were part of his background. They figured prominently in his next adventure, the Pentangle, whose 1968 eponymous

album led off with “Let No Man Steal Your Thyme.” The innovative ensemble merged the blues and folk sensibilities of Jansch, guitarist John Renbourn, and vocalist Jacqui McShee, with the jazz chops of double bassist Danny Thompson and drummer Terry Cox. It was an innovative, influential band whose third album, *Basket of Light* (Transatlantic), rose to No. 5 on the British charts. The album’s “Light Flight,” featuring changing time signatures, became the theme song of the popular BBC drama, *Take Three Girls*. Jansch occasionally played banjo; Renbourn sometimes added sitar. Most often it was Renbourn weaving lead lines around Jansch’s fingerpicking. “I think that was a very good learning experience for Renbourn, who became so good at second guitar parts,” says American fingerstyle master Duck Baker, who toured with Jansch. “The fact that Bert made him go 90 percent of the way to him was part of that.”

Jansch’s creativity found an outlet in Pentangle, but the inevitable discord between five musical individualists took hold after the success of *Basket*. None of the members, certainly not Jansch, enjoyed the trappings of fame. Their sixth and final album, *Solomon’s Seal* (Reprise), was released in September 1972.



He did not return to the acclaimed solo career established by his early Transatlantic recordings. Reprise, Pentangle's last label, released a solo Jansch album, *Moonshine*, with little fanfare, then dropped him. He took up with the cutting-edge Charisma Records, recorded 1974's *LA Turnaround* and 1975's *Santa Barbara Honeymoon*, solid albums backed by top LA session players, but commercial flops. "There was one period in the '70s when he went to just strumming," says Rod Clements, who played bass, mandolin, and guitar on *A Rare Conundrum*, Jansch's third Charisma release, recorded in London. "He was trying to get people to accept him as a songwriter and he tried to simplify his playing. *Santa Barbara Honeymoon*—there's hardly any fingerpicking on that."

Yet, there was exquisite fingerpicking on 1979's *Avocet* (Charisma), an instrumental album with fiddler Martin Jenkins and bassist Danny Thompson, made up of songs named after seabirds and wading birds. It didn't knock the Pretenders off the charts, but the critics were kind. Jansch's career doldrums were offset a bit by the 1982 reunion of Pentangle. The new incarnation lasted well into the '90s, with Jansch and Jacqui McShee the only original members to last through various lineups. It wasn't as lucrative as the old days, but it provided some sustenance. Jansch was in a slump, a situation aggravated by his dependence on alcohol. "I was a little bit in the firing line," Clements says. "He was living at my house for about 18 months, and I was in the position of looking after him. I had to make a few awkward phone calls to people saying that Bert wouldn't be able to come tonight."

**I**n October 1987, Jansch was sent to the hospital with a failing pancreas. He was advised that drinking alcohol was killing him. Clements stayed close during this pensive period, backing him in the studio and on the road. "I think he was feeling pretty low about everything," Clements says. "He'd made the decision not to drink again, which he stuck to, but I think people in that situation, it takes them awhile to readjust to life and rediscover their enthusiasms."

In sobriety, he rekindled his enthusiasm for music. He released two albums in 1990: *Sketches* (Temple), a reworking of older songs, and *The Ornament Tree* (Run River), comprised mostly of traditional material. Peter Kirtly was now his guitar wingman, meeting Renbourn's challenge of embellishing Jansch's ornamental guitar style. "Obviously, you don't play too much, don't play too little," Kirtly says. "We always left something

open so we could improvise. The scaffold was there for the melody and chords, but there was always room to maneuver."

Television viewers across the pond were reminded that the guitarist was still vital through the BBC documentary, 1992's *Acoustic Routes*, a celebration of the folk revival, which placed Jansch at the center. The next step in his return to relevance was the release of 1995's *When the Circus Comes to Town* (Cooking Vinyl), his first album of new, original material in ten years. Songs such as "Step Back," which laments the dashed hopes of the working class, and "Back Home," a rumination of an idyllic—(perhaps imagined)—childhood showed Jansch to be back in fine songwriting form.

**'If you look at the traditional songs he recorded, they've all got a very strong harmonic structure. He was definitely a man for harmony.'**

ARCHIE FISHER

The new millennium smiled upon Jansch with Colin Harper's clear-eyed yet laudatory 2000 biography, *Dazzling Stranger: Bert Jansch and the British Folk and Blues Revival* (Bloomsbury UK). Its publication arrived in tandem with *Dazzling Stranger: The Bert Jansch Anthology* (Castle). In 2001, he received a Lifetime Achievement honor at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, and he would be vaunted again in 2007 as a member of the original Pentangle. Younger artists such as Johnny Marr, Beth Orton, Bernard Butler, and Devendra Banhart, to name a few, cited his influence and joined him on the stage and in the studio. Four fine original albums followed *Circus*; all different works, but all returned to traditional songs, blues numbers, and postcards from his life. "High Times," from the last album, *The Black Swan*, reflects on a friend's death, tempering guilty remorse with warm memories.

Jansch died of lung cancer on October 5, 2011, cradled in the arms of his wife, Loren. Yet the preceding year, he had been busy touring with Neil Young, performing at the 2010 Crossroads Guitar Festival, sharing the bill with electric scorcherers such as Joe Bonamassa, Eric Clapton, and Jeff Beck. It's a fitting image from those final days, available on DVD, Jansch playing "Blackwaterside," near the end of the highway, mesmerizing the crowds, his way.

AC

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# BLUEGRASS MASTER CLASS



ILLUSTRATION BY OLIVIA WISE

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BLUEGRASS  
MASTER CLASS

Grant Gordy

## 6 rising stars are carrying on the tradition by making it their very own

BY JEFFREY PEPPER  
RODGERS

# NEXT-GEN

**B**luegrass is often tagged as a traditional genre, and it certainly has many fans with a specific historical idea about what the music is—and isn't. But in truth, there was nothing pure or traditional about the hard-driving fusion of string-band music, country, gospel, and blues that Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys pioneered in the 1940s. And over the decades since, players trained in this technically demanding genre have taken the music in new directions—mixing in elements of rock, jazz, Celtic, classical, and more, while tapping the power and precision of bluegrass instrumentation.

Today's rising generation of bluegrass-rooted musicians carries on the tradition of remaking the tradition in their own way, as is clear from my recent conversations with six standout guitarists. Some were born into bluegrass (Molly Tuttle, Billy Strings, Courtney Hartman of Della Mae) while others (Grant Gordy, Dave Bruzza of Greensky Bluegrass, Dave Wilson of Chatham County Line) got hooked on the high-lonesome sound after exploring other genres. AG asked these

players' about their paths into bluegrass, the flattop guitars and tools they use, and their tips for upping your bluegrass game.

### MOLLY TUTTLE

Bluegrass was all in the family for Molly Tuttle, whose father, Jack Tuttle, has taught aspiring pickers and fiddlers at the Northern California acoustic music mecca, Gryphon Stringed Instruments, since 1979. "I always wanted to be able to play like my dad," she recalls. "He would play Western swing songs and bluegrass standards like 'Sitting on Top of the World.'" Molly picked up the guitar at age eight, and at 11 started gigging with her siblings and dad as the Tuttles.

As a teenager, she expanded her chops transcribing solos by David Grier and other flatpicking luminaries, and then dug deeper as a guitar performance major at Berklee College of Music [see "Crosspicking 101," p. 50]. Along the way, she says, "I got really into Gillian Welch's singing and songwriting, and through that, I got obsessed with Dave Rawlings' guitar style. He has such a

unique voice. I was really inspired by that."

At 23, Tuttle is a masterful flatpicker and clawhammer player (on both banjo and guitar) as well as a fine, Alison Krauss-esque singer—the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) honored her as an up-and-coming instrumentalist with a 2016 Momentum Award, along with Billy Strings. Now based in Nashville, Tuttle performs solo, with the old-timey group the Goodbye Girls—one of many young bands on the scene that started at Berklee College of Music—and with her own Molly Tuttle Band.

### PLAYING TIP

For a fresh twist on picking technique, try clawhammer style. Tuttle was inspired by San Francisco Bay Area guitarist Michael Stadler to apply this old-time banjo technique to the guitar, using the G-modal tuning (D G D G C D). In terms of your picking hand, she says, "It's the same as the clawhammer banjo, except instead of having a high string on the top, which is your high-G string on the banjo, with your thumb you're going to hit either the fifth



Molly Tuttle



Dave Bruzza

# PICKERS

string or the sixth string." Tuttle's clawhammer guitar tunes, like "Old Man at the Mill," have incredible propulsion. For a video demo, see [AcousticGuitar.com](http://AcousticGuitar.com).

## WHAT SHE PLAYS

Huss and Dalton TD-R Custom dreadnought, with a thermo-cured red-spruce top and rosewood back and sides. D'Addario EXP17 coated phosphor-bronze medium strings. Shubb Fine-Tune capo. Dunlop JD Jazztone 207 picks. Amplification: external mic.

## DAVE BRUZZA

Like quite a few players raised on rock, Dave Bruzza of Greensky Bluegrass found a gateway into the bluegrass world through the Grateful Dead—more specifically through *Old and in the Way* (Rykco), Jerry Garcia's short-lived, all-star progressive bluegrass project from the '70s. (It also featured former Blue Grass Boy Peter Rowan and mando master David Grisman, among others.) "From there I went backwards and found all the old guys," Bruzza says. "But Jerry Garcia is really the epicenter of why I do what I do."

**'I got obsessed with Dave Rawlings' guitar style. He has such a unique voice!'**  
MOLLY TUTTLE

In founding Greensky Bluegrass in Michigan back in 2000, Bruzza and his bandmates were following the trail of such artists as John Hartford, the Seldom Scene, and New Grass Revival—in Bruzza's words, "the whole bluegrass vibe, but in a real rock 'n' roll sense." Various referred to as newgrass, progressive bluegrass, or jamgrass, this branch of bluegrass continues to thrive, led by Greensky and kindred spirits like Trampled by Turtles and the Infamous Stringdusters.

Originally a drummer, Bruzza, 36, approaches guitar with what he calls a "strong rhythmic edge." One look at his pedal board makes it clear that he takes a wide-open view of where you can take bluegrass instrumentation. "I'd say we're a very percussive string band," he says. "We definitely like to push boundaries."

## PLAYING TIP

One surefire way to improve your playing is to jam with musicians whose chops you admire. Bruzza often plays with his Colorado neighbor Tyler Grant, a national flatpicking champ, and finds he always learns from those sessions. "I try to play with people that I consider to be light years ahead of me technically," Bruzza says. "I like that because it gives me a nice challenge. When I get in a jam with someone, I always pick up something new and just keep growing."

## WHAT HE PLAYS

Two Santa Cruz Vintage Southerners, one of which has a Hipshot Guitar Xtender tuner on the sixth string, for quick transitions to drop-D tuning. Elixir 80/20 bronze medium strings. Shubb capo. Dunlop Gator Grip 2.0mm picks. Amplification: K&K Pure Mini transducer into a Grace Design FELIX preamp and an array of effects (including Pigtronix Echolutions delay, Aria distortion pedals, and a Chase Bliss Audio Wombtone analog phaser) for getting "weird and psychedelic."



## GRANT GORDY

Around age 17, Grant Gordy discovered what he calls “the coolest music I’d ever heard in my life”—David Grisman’s bluegrass/jazz/chamber fusion known as Dawg music, featuring such brilliant instrumentalists as Tony Rice, Darol Anger, and Mike Marshall. Gordy even decorated his bedroom with pixelated photos he scanned and blew up from the liner notes of the David Grisman Quintet’s *DGQ-20* compilation. “If I could visit myself at that age and say, ‘Man, someday you’re going to be in that band,’ I would have died,” Gordy says. “It would have freaked me out.”

Gordy did, in fact, hold the guitar chair in Grisman’s more recent band for six years, up through 2014. Today, one of his many projects is the quartet Mr. Sun with fiddler Darol Anger. Listening to Gordy’s spacious, sophisticated playing, it’s easy to understand why he’s been tapped by his heroes. Though fully capable of high-speed lines, Gordy says he’s always been conscious of “not wanting to be the blazing guitar slinger guy. Just aesthetically, that’s not what I want to do—play a bunch of notes and blow everybody’s head off for the sake of itself.”

Now 34 and living in Brooklyn, Gordy leads his own quartet. He recently released a gorgeous acoustic-guitar duo album with Ross Martin titled *Year of the Dog*, which spans fiddle tunes, gospel, jazz standards, and Bach.

### PLAYING TIP

Practicing with a metronome is the key to developing good time—and the better time you have, the more space you can leave in the music. “With bluegrass guitar, you have to have that perpetual motion, that right hand going—that’s a critical part of the style,” Gordy says. “But at the same time you don’t have to state every beat. It’s like, you can stay engaged in a conversation without just talking the whole time.”

When practicing with a metronome, Gordy suggests finding different ways to relate to the beat. Start with the click on beats 1 and 3, and then try it on 2 and 4—where the mandolin chop would fall in a bluegrass band. For an extra challenge, slow down the metronome tempo and play with the click on every third beat: the sequence goes 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, and then repeats. See music examples on page 32 and visit [AcousticGuitar.com](http://AcousticGuitar.com) for Gordy’s video demo.

### WHAT HE PLAYS

1944 Martin 000-18, 1998 Collings D1, 1975 Martin D-28, Hiroshi Suda dreadnought. Elliott capo. D’Addario EJ17 phosphor bronze medium strings. D’Andrea Pro Plec 1.5mm picks. Amplification: external mic.



Courtney Hartman  
of Della Mae

## COURTNEY HARTMAN

Colorado native Courtney Hartman started playing fiddle at the ripe old age of three, and grew up around fiddle contests and such festivals as RockyGrass. So when she picked up a guitar at eight years old, she recalls, “What I naturally wanted to learn to play was fiddle tunes on the guitar.” And she wanted to play them fiddle style, getting away from the typical flatpicking approach of machine-like, continuous eighth notes.

“I didn’t want to play guitar like a guitar player,” she says. “[Grammy-nominated bluegrass musician] Russ Barenberg was one of the earliest guys where I remember very specifically being like, I want to sound the way he sounds. It wasn’t all about just the notes. It was about the shape of the notes.”

As a student in Berklee’s American Roots Music program, Hartman joined the string band Della Mae in 2009, playing guitar and banjo and contributing original songs. The band made a splash on the roots-music circuit and scored a Grammy nomination for the 2013 album *This World Oft Can Be*. Last year, when Della Mae took a hiatus from the road, Hartman released a solo EP, a sweet set of original songs titled *Nothing We Say*. Now 26, she tours and teaches out of Brooklyn, an unlikely hotbed of contemporary bluegrass.

### PLAYING TIP

To develop a stronger melodic style on guitar, take your cue from vocals. “When we talk, we talk in sentences, and when we sing, we sing in phrases,” she says. “So base your playing on that foundation.” She recommends an exercise in which you sing a phrase and echo it on the guitar—see [acousticguitar.com](http://acousticguitar.com) for her video

demo. “If you’re singing and playing, you’re going to have to take a breath,” she says.

You can apply this vocal approach to all your playing, she adds. “When you go to learn something new, it’s really important to first make sure that you can sing it, that you can hear the melody in your head, and then go to play it. What we want to avoid is to have stuff based in our fingers, with just muscle memory.”

### WHAT SHE PLAYS

Bourgeois Aged Tone Brazilian D, A. Lawrence Smart archtop, 1890s Bruno parlor guitar. D’Addario EJ17 phosphor bronze medium strings. BlueChip TP50 picks. Elliott capo. K&K under-saddle pickup on the Bourgeois, through a Radial Tonebone preamp.

## DAVE WILSON

In the mid-’90s, Dave Wilson had played in various rock and alt-country bands, and was just starting to put together the combo that became Chatham County Line, when he encountered an album that transformed his musical world: 1995’s *Train a Comin’* (Warner Bros.) by Steve Earle. That album, on which Earle is backed by an acoustic band that includes Norman Blake, Emmylou Harris, and Peter Rowan, “seemed to encapsulate every single thing that we were trying to achieve—to tell a story with that great acoustic instrumentation,” Wilson says. “We’ve really never looked back.”

To play effectively in a bluegrass context, Wilson needed to do some woodshedding, so he bought all of Tony Rice and J.D. Crowe’s Bluegrass Album Band releases, put them in heavy rotation, and strummed along with his Martin. But playing alone in your room isn’t enough, he adds. “You’ll never really get the seasoning that



it takes to play live without going out and being forced to play better than you can actually play,” he says. “Picking circles and jams are a great way to solidify your playing. You have to be really uncomfortable at times to pull out what it is you’re capable of doing.”

Last fall, Chatham County Line released its seventh studio album, *Autumn*, continuing to explore the possibilities of storytelling songs over core instrumentation of acoustic guitar, banjo, mandolin, and bass. With his band celebrating two decades, Wilson, 40, is gratified to see the next wave of bluegrass-based groups emerge from his home turf of Raleigh, North Carolina, including Mandolin Orange and Mipso.

### PLAYING TIP

If you’re writing or arranging songs in the bluegrass idiom, don’t be afraid of your natural tendencies, Wilson advises—let the songs reflect whatever music you know and love, from whatever era. “You can write songs pretending like it’s 1947, but in reality the best thing you can do for the world and for the genre and just for yourself is to be open to everything you hear,” he says. “It’s been very liberating for us as a band to feel like we can be a moving cog in the present-day world.”

### WHAT HE PLAYS

Late 1960s Martin D-18, 1954 Martin D-28. D’Addario EJ17 phosphor bronze medium strings. Wegen picks. G7th Heritage capo. Amplification: Neumann KM 184 external mic.

## BILLY STRINGS

Billy Strings got his nickname as a bluegrass-obsessed kid in Michigan trying to keep up with his dad’s all-night picking parties at the



Billy Strings

campground. “You’d see little me there on the cooler,” says Strings, aka William Apostol, who got his first guitar at age four. “I had to get up every time somebody went to grab a beer. I was just trying to hang and pick with those guys.”

Before long Strings was more than keeping up—he was blowing past players of all ages with his clean, super-powered picking. After gigging extensively for several years with mandolinist Don Julin, Strings relocated in 2016 to Nashville, where one of his roommates is fellow IBMA Momentum Award-winning guitarist Molly Tuttle. Says Strings, with serious understatement, “It’s like a little guitar house.”

These days the main focus for Strings, 24, is his own band, with Billy Failing on banjo, Drew Matulich on mandolin, and Brad Tucker on

## ‘Instead of making the guitar sing, let the guitar sing!’

### BILLY STRINGS

bass. Though he counts Doc Watson as his earliest inspiration—along with his dad—Strings is now exploring extended jams and stylistic territory that defies easy description.

“I grew up with bluegrass and old-time music, but I really like Black Sabbath and Yes and King Crimson and Kendrick Lamar—everything, all across the board. I don’t want to pigeonhole myself. What I like about music is that it’s boundary-less.”

### PLAYING TIP

One secret to better tone is to relax, Strings says, especially when the tempo is blazing, don’t be frantic and try too hard to go fast. “Instead of making the guitar sing, *let* the guitar sing,” he says. “Sometimes I think I play too hard. I watch guys like Bryan Sutton, who is so relaxed, but he’s still getting volume and great tone. I think there’s a sweet spot. We’re still using our muscles and we still need to play loud—we’re playing guitars over banjos. But if you overdo it, you can actually lose tone and volume.”

### WHAT HE PLAYS

Preston Thompson mahogany dreadnought, with an Adirondack spruce top. Roy Noble mahogany dreadnought. BlueChip TP48 pick (because that’s what Bryan Sutton uses, confesses Strings). Elixir Nanoweb phosphor bronze medium strings. Elliott capo. Amplification: K&K pickup through a Fire-Eye Red-Eye preamp and, at times, effects including a phaser, distortion, and an envelope filter.



Dave Wilson, second from left, with Chatham County Line



# GRANT GORDY'S METRONOME EXERCISES

Playing with a metronome is an excellent way to improve your internal clock and your rhythmic interactions with other musicians. Here are three exercises that stress the beat in different ways.

Begin by setting your metronome to 90 beats per minute, with the clicks on beats 1 and 3, as in Ex. 1.

Without touching that metronome, play through Ex. 2, but shift the clicks to beats 2 and 4—the beats on which a drummer or mandolin player would be most active. This makes you more responsible for what happens on the downbeats.

Now decrease your metronome to 60 beats per minute. Play Ex. 3, which has a click every third beat (1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, 1 2 3 4, etc.): yet another way of relating to the beat, and a great exercise for increasing your sense of rhythmic confidence.



## Ex. 1

$\text{♩} = 90$

Metronome: X 2 X 4 X 2 X 4 X 2 X 4 X 2 X 4



## Ex. 2

$\text{♩} = 90$

1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X

0 2 3 0 2 0 2 0 3 2 0 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 0 3 2 0 2 3 0 2

1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X

0 2 3 0 1 2 0 2 0 2 0 2 0 3 0 2 0 1 3 1 2 0 2 0 2 3 0 2

1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X

0 2 3 0 2 3 1 0 1 2 0 2 0 3 2 0 3 2 0 2 3 2 0 3 2 2 0 2

1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X 1 X 3 X

0 2 3 0 1 0 2 0 3 2 3 0 2 3 0 2 0 1 3 1 2 0 2 0 2 3 3 0 2

## Ex. 3

$\text{♩} = 60$

1 2 X 4 1 X 3 4 X 2 3 X 1 2 X 4

0 2 3 0 2 0 2 0 3 2 3 0 2 3 2 0 2 3 2 0 3 2 0 3 2 3 0 2



# NEXT-GEN PICKERS

1 X 3 4 X 2 3 X 1 2 X 4 1 X 3 4

0 2 3 0 1 0 2 0 2 0 3 3 0 2 3 0 2 0 2 3

X 2 3 X 1 2 X 4 1 X 3 4 X 2 3 X

0 2 3 0 1 0 2 0 2 0 3 2 0 3 0 3 2 2 0 3 2 0 3 3 0 2

1 2 X 4 1 X 3 4 X 2 3 X 1 2 X 4

0 2 3 0 1 0 2 0 2 3 2 0 3 2 1 3 0 3 1 0 3 1 0 3 1 1 1

1 X 3 4 X 2 3 X 1 2 X 4 1 X 3 4

0 2 0 1 1 0 1 1 3 0 3 1 0 3 3 0 3 3 0 1 0 3 1 0 2 0

X 2 3 X 1 2 X 4 1 X 3 4 X 2 3 X 1 2 X 4

1 3 0 3 0 1 3 0 2 0 1 2 0 2 3 0 2 0 1 3 1 2 0 2 0 2 3 0 2 3 1 0 0 2 3

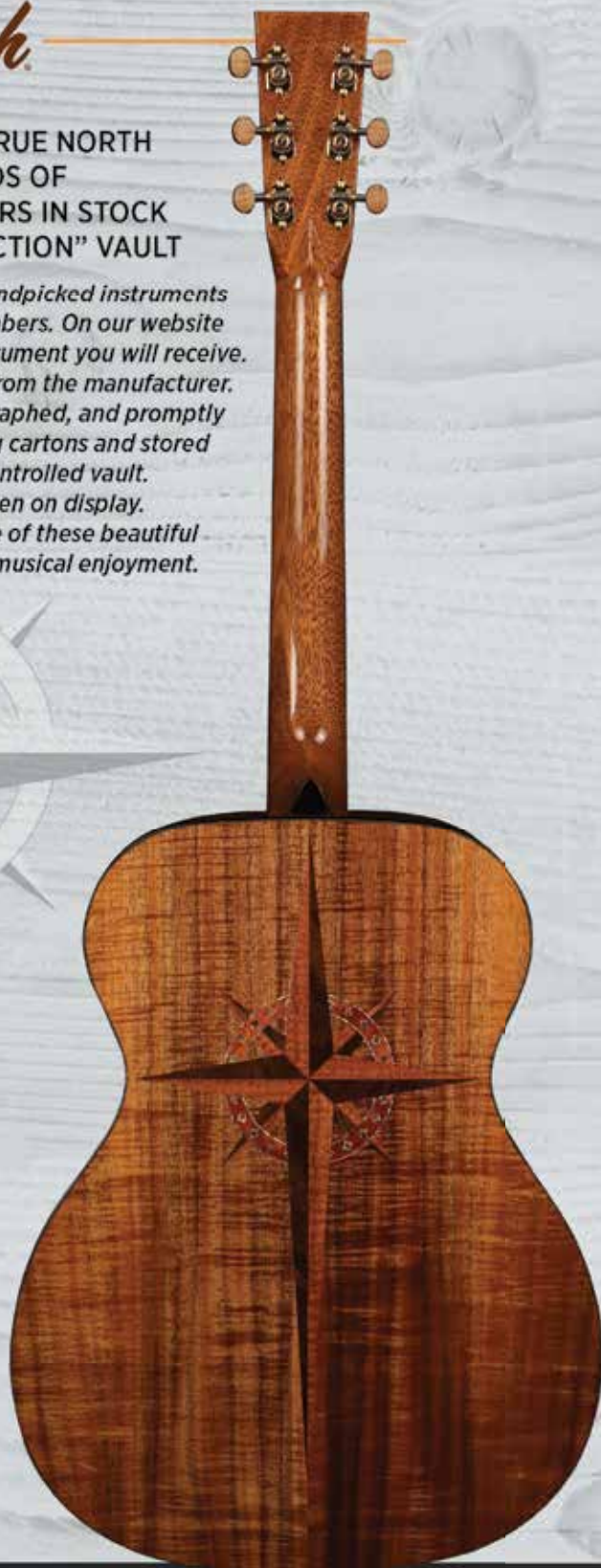
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True blue:  
Shawn Camp

# BACK TO THE SOURCE

Guitarist Shawn Camp of the Earls of Leicester gets to wear a Colonel Sanders string tie and emulate Lester Flatt—life is good

BY KENNY BERKOWITZ

**A**t seven years old, Jerry Douglas saw Flatt and Scruggs for the first time. He never forgot that night, and 50 years later, after cutting a tribute album with Charlie Cushman (banjo) and Johnny Warren (fiddle), he formed the Earls of Leicester, dedicated to the music of bluegrass greats Lester Flatt (1914–79) and Earl Scruggs (1924–2012). Douglas invited Shawn Camp (guitar, lead vocals), Union Station bandmate Barry Bales (bass), and Tim O'Brien (mandolin) to complete the sextet, produced their self-titled debut, and brought home the 2015 Grammy for Best Bluegrass Album.

*The Earls of Leicester* was as perfect as bluegrass gets, played with all the passion, all the joy, all the exuberance of the Earls' boyhood heroes. It's hard to believe but the follow-up, 2016's *Rattle & Roar*, is at least as good, even after O'Brien's departure for Hot Rize. After a string of replacements, Jeff White is now playing mandolin and singing tenor harmony, while Camp is becoming the focus of the band, juggling gigs as a solo act and as one-fifth of the World Famous Headliners to settle into this role as bluegrass royalty.

Covering a range of standards ("Flint Hill Special" and "The Train that Carried My Girl from Town") and rarities ("Pray for the Boys" and "Steel Guitar Blues"), these 17 new tracks find the Earls at the top of their game, playing for the pure, time-warped pleasure of being a latter-day Foggy Mountain Boys, string ties and all. For Douglas, it's the fulfilment of a lifelong dream. In the middle of their other projects, the Earls have recast themselves as standard bearers for old-school bluegrass, making the classic sound come alive for a new generation of listeners.

## How did you come to join the Earls of Leicester?

About three years ago, Jerry Douglas called and said, "We're doing this Flatt and Scruggs band, and we want to know if you'd like to be Lester." I said [swooping in imitation of Flatt's voice], "Whyyyyyyyy, yes, I suuuuuure would." That was it. I remember the first rehearsal, we were a couple of bars in, and it was so overwhelming, I had to stop the band. I just could not believe it was happening, that I was standing in the middle of Flatt and Scruggs.

## We're playing on Stringbean's back porch and there's a huge bonfire silhouetting Earl Scruggs. In my mind, that was as good as you could get.

### What does it mean to be Lester?

I don't know how to answer that. I knew Lester was great, but I didn't understand *how* great until I stepped into his shoes. These songs demand the lead vocalist to sing the way he did, with the whole band riding on that vocal line. It's not an easy task.

### And as a guitarist?

I tried a time or two to play with a thumbpick and fingerpick, like Lester did, and it's amazing to hear the power you get in a strum. I'm playing as close as I can with a flatpick, and I hope to sound a little more like Lester as

time goes on, but I'm not about to stick on a thumbpick and a fingerpick and pretend I'm Lester Flatt. I can't stand alongside people who are playing at this level if I'm not giving my best. In all honesty, I really don't sound anything like Lester Flatt. I sound like me, but . . . in the flavor of Lester Flatt, which is the best I can do. I stick that Lester Flatt G-run in every chance I get, and the rest of the time, I'm just hanging on tight, hoping I don't fall off this wagon [see sidebar, "Pickin' Lester Flatt's G Run"].

### What's your role in this band?

Just holding down my little corner of the pie. I try to keep the feel of the songs and keep the crowd moving. The job of acoustic guitar is to keep the rhythm going, keep the power of the band at a high level. If I were to step up there to do solos, the whole band would have to drop down, sonically and dynamically. We'd lose our drive, and if that happened, we'd lose everything we've been shooting for from the beginning—to honor Flatt and Scruggs. It's totally out of respect, out of love for their music, to do it as close to the original as anybody ever has.

### Do you remember the first time you heard Flatt and Scruggs?

Nah, they've been there since before I was born. Growing up in Arkansas, I would hear them on the local radio stations, and my folks had their records. Plus, watching *The Beverly Hillbillies* television show, they were frequent guests. I started playing guitar when I was five, drug one around from the time I could walk.

### PICKIN' LESTER FLATT'S G RUN

The image shows musical notation for a guitar solo titled "PICKIN' LESTER FLATT'S G RUN". It is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature. The melody is written on a single staff. Above the staff, the chords G, D, and G are indicated. The melody consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some triplets. Below the staff, there are fret numbers (0, 2, 3) and a string number (3) indicating the string to be played. The notation is a simplified version of the original, focusing on the basic notes and rhythm.





The Earls of Leicester:  
Shawn Camp, third from the left

## The job of acoustic guitar is to keep the rhythm going, keep the power of the band at a high level.

### What were you playing at five years old?

I had a little Sears and Roebuck guitar that I got for Christmas. My daddy taught me some straight chords, and every evening after supper, we would play a few songs. Then, one day when I was seven, my mom and dad went shopping, and left me at the house with my guitar and my Mamaw, my daddy's mother. She played Carter-style guitar with her thumb and fingers, and by the time they came back from shopping, I was able to play "The Wildwood Flower" for them. That was the first time I picked a melody, and from that time on, I'd go to sleep at night, dream about songs I'd never played, wake up the next morning, pick up my guitar, and play them. It was moving quick for me. I just loved it so much. We would go to different folks' houses and have picking parties, even then. You never knew what style of music you'd be playing, but it was always fun, and I couldn't wait for the next picking party to happen. At eight, I started playing mandolin, and at 15 I got a fiddle. Within six months of that, I was working as a fiddle player at VFWs, American Legions. I'm sure I sounded awful, but fiddle players were hard to find.

### Did you know Earl?

Oh yeah. Picked with him a few times, actually.

### Tell me about that.

The one that really stands out is when we were on the back porch of Stringbean's old house. [David "Stringbean" Akeman played in Bill Monroe's Blue Grass Boys from 1942–45, when he was replaced by Scruggs. Akeman remained a star of the Grand Ole Opry until he was murdered in 1973.] This lady had bought the shack that Stringbean lived in, remodeled it, and this was the first time there had been music at that house since the day he died. I'm on the back porch, Earl Scruggs is sitting to my left. We're facing the old shack and we're playing "Pike County Breakdown." There was a pile of old tongue-and-groove wall boards in the yard. In the middle of the song, somebody struck a match and lit that pile, and that flame jumped out 20 feet in the air, made the hair on my head stand up. We're playing on Stringbean's back porch and there's a huge bonfire silhouetting Earl Scruggs. In my mind, that was as good as you could get.

### What was Earl like?

Just a nice, down-to-earth guy, an old boy from North Carolina who knew how to play the banjo. A friendly guy, I felt like we were friends. The last time I saw him was at Cracker Barrel by the Opry, he's sitting at a two-topper table by himself. And I walked up and said, "Mr. Scruggs,

how are you doing?" And he said, "Sit down," and we visited for, I don't know, ten minutes. He'd ordered a bowl of pinto beans, a slice of onion, corn bread, and a big glass of milk. That's a high-level country-boy lunch right there. I visited while he ate his beans and I got to pick up the tab. That was the last time I saw him. I wish I'd known I was going to be doing this band, but that was before it all started.

### What do you love about this music?

It just feels right, you know? There's nothing phony about it, no way to fake this. It's either there or not there, you either got it or you ain't. There's no luck. I mean, we record live, there's nothing fixed or anything. What you hear on our records, that's what we played. It's not like country radio, where everybody is recording in isolation booths, punching in stuff here and there. There's none of that allowed in this music.

### What can you do with the Earls that you can't do anywhere else?

This is the only place I can wear a Colonel Sanders tie. Everywhere else, it wouldn't look as cool.

### What else?

I get a rush out of playing this old, driving bluegrass. When you look at the audience, 80 percent of these people weren't even alive when Earl and Lester started out, so it's an

amazing thing to see them vibrate to this music. That gives us a reason for doing it, seeing people light up for the first time.

#### How do you describe the current state of bluegrass?

I started going to bluegrass festivals at a young age, traveling to Oklahoma or Texas or wherever. But I was out of touch with the bluegrass world until about three years ago, when I started working with the Earls. Coming back after all these years, I can see the musicianship is a lot better than it used to be. Musicianship-wise, the younger generation always takes it to a new level—our high-water mark was their starting point. Plus, they have a means of slowing stuff down on YouTube, zeroing in on exactly what's going on. But as part of getting back into this world, I realized that most of the true bluegrass legends of the first generation are gone. They've all died off, which is one of the reasons we put this band together. Somebody needed to hit the reset button, and I think that's what we're doing.

#### What would you like that younger generation to know?

That they need to go back to Flatt and Scruggs or Bill Monroe, listen to the founding fathers of this style. That's the foundation. Because it was right, and if that foundation wasn't as solid, the music wouldn't have been anywhere near as good. Whatever music I'm into at any given time, I try to get as close to the source as possible. And in this music, that source is Flatt and Scruggs. **AG**

#### WHAT SHAWN CAMP PLAYS

In the months since recording *Rattle & Roar*, Shawn Camp has changed guitars. "For the album, I played a 1936 Martin D-18 that I bought from my buddy, [songwriter] Phillip Lammonds, which was supposedly Gram Parsons' in the early '60s," says Camp, who adds a heavier G string to his set of standard D'Addario phosphor bronze EJ17s. "I just bought a '39 Martin D-28 Herringbone from Bryan Sutton, and that's what I'm loving right now. It's the first pre-war D-28 I've ever owned, and as far as tone, it is just head and shoulders above the others. Bill Monroe had a 1939 Herringbone, so that's what Lester played in the band. The D-18 is a great guitar, but the D-28 has a richer Brazilian rosewood tone. If I'm going to do this gig, I've got to play a D-28."

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Ron Block, known for banjo, is expanding his bluegrass-guitar skills.

# STATE OF THE UNION

## Union Station member Ron Block on developing your technical skills

BY ANDY HUGHES

**R**on Block is best known as the banjo player with Alison Krauss and Union Station. But Block has been busy expanding the bluegrass-guitar side of his skills. On a recent trip to the UK, he had time to discuss his formative influences (a TV performance by Lester Flatt), buying his first good guitar at his father's music store (a 1969 Martin D-18), his tunings, and the best way to start learning to play bluegrass.

### What is your current go-to guitar?

It depends if I'm flying to a show. I have been playing Rick Hayes guitars lately—he's a great guitar builder. I have a 1938 Martin D-28 Herringbone, a 1937 Herringbone, and a 1938 Martin D-18—these are the main guitars I use for recording. I also have a 1946 Martin 00-18, which I used on the song "Paper Airplane." It has a small body and a really neat sound.

### Do you like to vary your tunings or do you maintain a set of tunings for both solo and accompaniment?

I've been trying to corral my tunings over the last couple of years. I try to stick with open G, and variations of that. Drop D and double-drop D—stuff that is related. There are things that [Union Station songwriter] R.L. Castleman has used on songs like "Forget About It" and "Restless," and I have used the tunings he used. I am trying not to record with those tunings because it is a distinctive sound, and if you use them too often, things start to sound the same. But, yes, I am trying to get my tunings into some sort of order. I try to use tunings without radical changes, so I don't have to carry three guitars with me on the road when I go out on solo gigs, or re-tune onstage all the time. I would love to just be able to think about what each song needs, and be able to go with that, but now I have to think about playing solo shows live, and the practicalities that are involved with that. You can't be tuning and re-tuning all the time, it really takes away from the atmosphere and the dynamics of a show.

### Let's talk about your experience with string-bending.

My introduction and influences on string bending involve two guys, both named Larry. The first one is Larry Sparks, who played with

the Stanley Brothers and had his own solo career and his own band as well. He was an old-style bluegrass player, and he added a lot of bluesy touches to his playing. He used to do some string-bending with his own style of playing. The other guy is Larry Carlton. He made an instructional video in which he talked about string-bending, and he talked about checking the pitch when you are bending the B string from the sixth to the eighth fret; you need to bend it and then check the pitch on the eighth fret. One thing that makes my playing a little different is going straight to the note that gives it the same purity and feeling of passion that Carlton used to have. The beauty of Carlton's string-bends is the in-tune-ness of them. On an acoustic, I use my third finger to bend, and then the middle finger to help push that string up. I do advocate using an additional finger to help the bend, or as a guide.

### If you're in a bluegrass band, the first thing you must do is revere the song.

#### Do you like finger picks, or do you prefer the skin contact on the strings?

I always use finger and thumb picks when I play banjo because that is the bluegrass banjo sound. In terms of acoustic guitar, I've gone back and forth a little between using picks and playing with my fingers. I used finger picks on the song "The Lucky One," with Union Station, because that was the sound I wanted, and it is always about getting the right sound. I usually use a thumb pick, and then use my fingers, that combination works the best for me.

#### Does banjo playing inform your acoustic guitar playing, and vice versa?

Yes, it very much does. At first, I felt they were entirely separate. I would listen to players like J.D. Crowe or Larry Sparks for their banjo playing, and then I would pick up the Stanley Brothers guitar players, like George Shuffler. Tony Rice is another bluegrass guitarist that I got into—I loved the syncopation he used when he played.

#### What do you think are the specific skills involved in playing bluegrass guitar, which are not necessarily applicable to other acoustic-guitar styles?

Well, of course, that all depends on what you actually want to do. Bluegrass is all about improvisation, but there is a body of tunes that are common to bluegrass players, as there are in a lot of different genres. Blues musicians have them, so do jazz players—they are standard tunes that people know and can play when they get together. In terms of actual technique, the right hand has a real economy of motion, and that is important to understand. When you are fast picking, you can't have extravagant hand movements, it is all really economical, and that is a vital building block in terms of bluegrass-guitar technique.

#### How important is technical ability?

I think you do need to develop your technical skill as an acoustic guitarist as far as you can if you want to play bluegrass music. It's interesting, the older I get, the more I see that people who have developed that sense of technical skill are seen as "talented," and people who have not are "not talented." I see it a little differently: In my view, people who are seen as talented are people who can see into something and see how it works. The person seen as less talented maybe doesn't see as deeply into what they are doing, or doesn't take the time to look deeply enough.

#### Do you have technical aspects of your playing that you are still working on?

Absolutely, I do! I am always looking for ways to improve—I don't think you can ever say that you have got everything you need as a musician. When I see someone who plays beautifully, I will look to see what they have that I haven't learned yet, and start figuring out how to get what it is. I will always ask questions, it doesn't matter if the musician is younger than me, it's not important. I have learned stuff from [22-year-old] Sierra Hull just by watching her play. I think I need to experiment with some of the stuff she does with her right hand. I am all for dialogue with musicians—I wouldn't go up to someone I don't know and ask them to show me something in their technique, but Sierra and I talk back and forth about technical stuff all the time. Sierra is a studied musician always looking to get better.



**Part of developing skills is being able to play faster on your acoustic. Have you developed a technique to help you?**

I have been playing close attention to what I have already referred to as my economy of motion. I have been the slow and medium-paced player with Union Station—I play the solos on “Now That I’ve Found You” and “When You Say Nothing at All,” those pretty songs, and that requires a particular technique and the emphasis is on the best tone I can get. It doesn’t require economy of movement, in fact, it requires a rest stroke—when I play the fourth string, I push through and rest my pick on the third string. So that works fine for the slow tunes that need a good tone, but it doesn’t help me at all when I am looking to play faster guitar. It’s not that I can’t play fast as such, but what I want is to get really comfortable with the faster tempos.

**That’s the opposite way most musicians learn—they get as fast as they can as soon as they can, and then have to learn how to play slowly.**

That’s absolutely right! Especially in bluegrass, where people start learning the fiddle tunes and those are fast. That’s the most attractive style for a young player to grasp first. But I was always the banjo player and I would play fast banjo on the fast tunes, and slow, good-tone acoustic on the slow songs, so I never developed the fast technique for acoustic, because I never really needed it—that’s just not the way I developed as a musician. It is really interesting at my age, I’m 62, to be going back and learning a technique to play guitar. I am noticing a vast improvement in my playing as I go—it’s all been focused on that economy of movement with my pick motion. It is satisfying, and frustrating at the same time. I find myself thinking, why didn’t I learn this stuff when I was 18? But the same rules apply to progressing as a musician. I sit downstairs and work on something for an hour or so, and then I can think, OK, I can play that now, and that has always been really satisfying, and that has never changed, so it’s just a matter of applying that approach to this technique.

**There is an art to accompaniment in a band, especially in bluegrass.**

It’s true, and if you’re in a bluegrass band, the first thing you must do is revere the song. Then, when the singer is singing the song, you revere the singer, and when a musician is playing a solo, you revere the musician and the solo. If you adopt that attitude, you’ll avoid playing stuff simply to get attention for yourself. My objective in Union Station is to have the audience’s attention on me only at the times it’s *supposed* to be on me, and that’s all. If



COURTESY OF RON BLOCK

I’m playing guitar fills behind Alison Krauss, I want the fills to be pretty, but not so pretty that they distract from what Alison is singing, and the lyrics and their meaning. That is my outlook—you are there to be in a band, not to promote yourself. That doesn’t apply if you are a solo player with a backing band, but if you are a band member looking to get attention, you are not going to be a good band member. And, more dangerously, you risk giving the audience ear fatigue. What you never want is a person saying, yeah, I liked what he or she did, but it was always out at the front of the sound, and I just got bored with it. That’s the beauty of Union Station, everyone knows how to weave in and out, when to take their solos, and when to sit back, which is just as important.

**What’s a good tune, or tunes, for anyone who wants to embark on learning bluegrass guitar?**

Well, it really depends on your skill level, because I have to say that bluegrass is not a style for beginners! You do need a certain level of technical skill to be able to get to grips with bluegrass. One thing I do wish I had spent more time on when I was learning, and I would pass this advice on to anyone who wants to learn bluegrass, is learn the fiddle tunes. The technical facility and dexterity that you get when you learn fiddle tunes note for note is really helpful. You encounter problems like how to play a right-hand down stroke on the G, and then up on the B, and then down again on the E, and you have to figure out your own way to get past those issues. So, yeah, flatpicking fiddle tunes, learning them, will give you the level of dexterity you need to play bluegrass properly. The problem is, some people play far too many notes, and then it becomes a note-fest instead of a melody. You do play off the melody, and that’s fine, but you need

to keep that melody near, don’t stray too far off it so you can’t get back easily. You have to tease the audience’s expectations a little. Play a little of the melody, so they think you are going to carry on with that melody, and then you go off it a little, and just when they wonder what you’re doing, you head back onto the melody again. Audiences like that. I know that’s what I like to hear when I am listening to bluegrass guitar, that going off and coming back to the melody.

**Do you have a favorite song, either from your own material, or from the Union Station live set?**

Well, when Alison Krause and Union Station are choosing tunes, we have a real long selection process, and that means that I never get tired of the tunes we play. We never have a song in our live set that any of us are thinking, “I don’t really like this song,” because during the selection process, that song will have been left out, and won’t have made it to the recording sessions, so it doesn’t make the set for live shows. We do have some songs that get weeded out over time, but all bands do that to keep things fresh for themselves and for their audiences. When we play a song like “Baby Now That I’ve Found You,” there are elements that have to be there. The stuff that [Dobro player] Jerry Douglas plays, for example, if his sound is not in there, it sounds like a different song. That’s the strength of what Jerry does spontaneously while we are recording—he puts sounds in there that seem like they have always belonged in the song. When we take solos, we do play something a little different, shake things up a little. I never want to go to a live show and just hear the record played to me. I want something that is played around with, some different fills, something different on the solos. That’s what I enjoy. **AC**

# CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK



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# PICKING A WINNER

Flatpicking champion Scott Fore offers 5 tips on acing a competition

BY PAT MORAN

**“I** love flatpicking, but I could never afford a decent guitar,” Scott Fore says. “The only way I was going to get one was to win it.” From humble beginnings—Fore taught himself to play with a library book and picks fashioned “from broken 78 records and plastic milk jugs”—the 57-year-old guitarist has gone on to win multiple competitions, most notably the prestigious National Flatpicking Contest at the Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas, placing second in 2000 and 2014, and winning first place in 2002 and 2015.

Fore teaches the techniques he’s devised, such as “guitar chi,” his fluid, minimalist right-hand picking method derived from his martial-arts training. And he’s published a dozen secrets to his success in 2005’s *Flatpicking Solos: 12 Contest-Winning Arrangements* (Cherry Lane Music). Speaking by phone from his home in Radford, Virginia, Fore shares tips on picking and winning.

## 1 FOLLOW THE RULES

“So many people don’t read the rules,” Fore says, noting that Winfield’s maximum performance time is five minutes, with two minutes and 30 seconds the preferred mark. “Look at how you’re scored,” he adds, citing Winfield’s criteria: 40 points for arrangement, 40 for

execution, 10 for dynamics, and 10 for overall impression. Though execution is key to competing—“sometimes the fastest, loudest guy wins,” Fore says with a chuckle—“more often than not, a good arrangement is what takes the prize.”

## 2 MAKE NEW ARRANGEMENTS

“Points for arrangement are mostly based on originality. If you play someone else’s arrangement, twist it around and play those runs on a different part of the neck.” To keep arrangements fresh, Fore has devised two training tools: “What if?” and “one note.”

“What if?” is a tool that takes you out of your comfort zone and leads to experimentation. It’s a game,” Fore explains, “I ask myself, how would I play Bill Cheatham if I was the Allman Brothers, playing both Duane’s and Dickey’s parts?” Then Fore plays it to see if it works.

He advocates practicing a “one-note” solo with all possible variations to expand your approach to arrangements. “You take a C note and you put it with an A-minor chord, all of the sudden it’s a minor third. You put it with the F chord, now it’s a fifth. When you play a note in multiple places, it opens up options.”

## 3 PLAY A TUNE

In competition, “throw in all the techniques you can—crosspicking, harmonics,

chords—but also play a song that flows from beginning to end.”

At many contests, the judges don’t hear any back up, just the contestant’s microphone. “Record your arrangement just by itself, and then listen critically. See if you hear holes,” he says. “Don’t forget you’re playing a tune as well as a showcase.”

## 4 DON’T HOLD BACK

Winfield has a pool of 40 contestants, Fore explains. “Once you make the Top 5, you go to round two. Your job in round one is to make it to the final round, where you only have four other guys to beat instead of 40.” If you don’t play your best stuff in round one, you may never get to play it at all.

## 5 WINNING ISN’T EVERYTHING?

The first year Fore went to Winfield, he placed second and won that decent guitar he wanted. “It was a Collings with the wheat on the headstock,” he recalls. “The only way to get one was to win one, so it’s like a badge of honor.”

Now he has three of them.

“It’s funny. A week after I won that guitar, I was at a stoplight and I realized that’s not why I entered the contest at all. I wanted to be No. 1.”

In 2002, he got his wish.

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# SCOTT FORE/'BLACKBERRY BLOSSOM'

Cont. from p. 45

24

D G Em

28

B7 Em C G

32

D G G D C G C G

36

A7 D G D C G C G

40

D G D C G C G

44

A7 D G D C G C G

**D G Em**

48

*Harm. (through bar 64, diamond noteheads only)*

**B7 Em C G**

52

**D G Em**

56

**B7 Em C G**

60

**D G D C G C G**

64

**A7 D G D C G C G**

68

Cont. on p. 48



# SCOTT FORE/'BLACKBERRY BLOSSOM'

Cont. from p. 47

72

D G D C G C G

Bass line fret numbers: 0 3 2 0 3 0 5 7 0 7 0 7 4 0 7 0 7 0 3 8 7 8 7 8 7

76

A7 D G D C G C G

Bass line fret numbers: 0 3 0 7 8 0 7 4 0 7 0 9 7 9 7 4 0 7 0 7 0 3 8 7 8 7 8 7

80

D G Em

Bass line fret numbers: 0 3 2 0 3 2 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 7 0 0

84

B7 Em C G

Bass line fret numbers: 0 7 8 0 7 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 7 0 0 7 8 0 7 0 7 0

88

D G Em

Bass line fret numbers: 7 0 7 0 3 3 2 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 7 0 0

92

B7 Em C G D G

Bass line fret numbers: 0 7 8 0 7 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 0 7 0 0 0 7 8 0 7 0 7 0 7 0 0 0 3

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Barbara Streisand	Cyndi Lauper	Genesis	Juanes	Mike Snow	Roger Waters	The Lumineers
Barenaked Ladies	Daniel Lanois	Godsmack	Justin Timberlake	Miranda Lambert	Rush	The National
Blue Man Group	Dave Natale	Gomez	Kaiser Chiefs	MO	Rusty Cooley	The Rolling Stones
Beck	Dave Stewart	Goo Goo Dolls	Kanye West	Monster Truck	Sam Roberts	The Tragically Hip
Beyoncé	Dave Matthews	Grand Ole Opry	Katy Perry	Mötley Crüe	Santana	The Prodigy
Billy Idol	David Bottrill	Green Day	K.D. Lang	Mumford & Sons	Sarah McLachlan	The White Stripes
Billy Joel	David Gilmour	Gregg Allman	Keb' Mo'	Muse	Scissor Sisters	The Who
Blue Rodeo	Deadmau5	Gwen Stefani	Keith Urban	My Morning Jacket	Seal	Timbaland
Billy Sheehan	Death Cab for Cutie	Hall & Oates	Kelly Clarkson	Nathan East	Selena Gomez	Tom Waits
Biffy Clyro	Def Leppard	Herbie Hancock	Kenny Chesney	NBC Television	Sevendust	Tommy Emmanuel
Blake Shelton	Derek Trucks	Hedley	Kenny Loggins	NEEDTOBREATHE	Shakira	Tony Bennett
Bob Dylan	Devin Townsend	HAIM	Kings of Leon	Neil Young	Shania Twain	Tony Levin
Bon Jovi	Diana Krall	Havok	Korn	Nelly Furtado	Sheryl Crow	Toots & the Maytals
Bonnie Raitt	Dimmu Borgir	Hinder	KISS	Nickelback	Shinedown	U2
Brent Mason	Disney	Il Divo	KT Tunstall	Night Riots	Simple Plan	Usher
Brad Paisley	Dixie Chicks	Imagine Dragons	Lady Gaga	Nine Inch Nails	Slash	Van Halen
Bruce Hornsby	Dolly Parton	Iron Maiden	Lenny Kravitz	Of Montreal	Slayer	Victor Wooten
Bruce Springsteen	Don Ross	James Taylor	Leland Sklar	One Republic	Sleeping with Sirens	Vince Gill
Bruno Mars	Dream Theater	Jamiroquai	Leo Kottke	Our Lady Peace	Slipknot	Vintage Trouble
Bryan Adams	Duran Duran	Janet Jackson	Leonard Cohen	Panic! at the Disco	Snow Patrol	Volbeat
Buddy Guy	Dwight Yoakam	Jason Mraz	Linkin Park	Pat Metheny	Soundgarden	Weezer
Butch Walker	Earth, Wind & Fire	Jeff Beck	Lionel Richie	Paul Boothroyd	Steely Dan	Will.i.am
Cannibal Corpse	Ed Sheeran	Jennifer Lopez	Little Big Town	Paul McCartney	Steve Earle	Whitesnake
Carrie Underwood	Elton John	Jerry Douglas	Luther Dickinson	Paul Simon	Steve Lukather	X Ambassadors
Casting Crowns	Emmylou Harris	Jason Aldean	Macy Gray	Pink	Steve Miller	Zac Brown Band
CBS Television	Enrique Iglesias	Jimmy Buffett	Marcus Miller	Portugal. The Man	Steve Morse	Zakk Wylde
				Peter Dinklage	Steve Stevens	Zella Day

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# CROSSPICKING 101

A private lesson with Molly Tuttle

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS

**C**rosspicking is an essential technique in the bluegrass guitar toolkit. Pioneered by Stanley Brothers guitarist George Shuffler in the 1950s, and carried forward by such players as Doc Watson, Clarence White, and Tony Rice, crosspicking is essentially a guitar version of the finger-picked banjo roll—you flatpick individual notes across the strings, creating rolling patterns that outline both the melody and the chords. The technique works well for accompaniment, as an elegant alternative to strumming, as well as chord-melody-style solos.

One young player with a fine, fluid crosspicking style is Molly Tuttle (see interview on p. 28). For a sample, check out her

gorgeous YouTube rendition of John Hartford's "Gentle on My Mind." Tuttle is also a clear and patient teacher, and she shared the following exercises to get started with crosspicking, and then a couple of simple arrangements for practicing the technique: "Wildwood Flower" and "Worried Man Blues."

## FORGET ABOUT FRETTING

Classic bluegrass crosspicking involves playing across a group of three adjacent strings, usually in a pattern of eighth notes. To get the hang of it with your picking hand, Tuttle suggests, forget about fretting for now and just focus on picking open strings.

Start by playing across strings 4, 3, and 2,

low to high. First, use alternate picking—alternating down- and upstrokes—as shown in **Ex. 1**. In this example and the others that follow, let all the notes ring and overlap. Loop the pattern and gradually increase the tempo as you get comfortable. **Ex. 2** uses two downstrokes followed by an upstroke.

These two picking patterns sound different—the down-down-up picking is smoother. Tuttle favors alternate picking, but says, "A lot of amazing guitar players use this down-down-up pattern. You'll see Tony Rice break away from the alternating pick direction, and he might put in two or more downs in a row."

Now, practice moving this three-string pattern across the fingerboard, as in **Ex. 3**.

### Ex. 1

[illegible]

### Ex. 2

### Ex. 3

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented in two systems. The first system contains the first six measures of the melody and the corresponding bass line. The second system contains the remaining six measures. The melody is written on a single staff with a treble clef, and the bass line is on a single staff with a bass clef. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass line consists of quarter and eighth notes.

### Ex. 4

### Ex. 5

### Ex. 6

The musical notation for the guitar solo is presented in two staves. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one flat (Bb), and the time signature is 12/8. The solo consists of six measures. The first two measures are in the key of Bb, and the last four measures are in the key of A. The notation includes various guitar-specific techniques such as bends, vibrato, and double stops. The bass staff shows the fretting hand positions, with numbers 0-4 indicating frets.

### Ex. 7

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented in two systems. The first system features a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written on a single staff, starting with a quarter rest followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The second system features a bass clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written on a single staff, starting with a quarter rest followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The score is divided into two measures by a double bar line. The first measure contains the first six measures of the melody, and the second measure contains the remaining six measures. The melody is written in a simple, folk-like style, with a clear emphasis on the eighth and quarter notes.

### Ex. 8

### Ex. 9

### Ex. 10

The musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is presented in two systems. The first system features a treble clef and a single melodic line with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The melody is written in a simple, folk-like style with eighth and quarter notes. Below the staff, there is a series of rhythmic markings: a square symbol followed by 'V', and this pair is repeated multiple times with varying spacing. The second system features a bass clef and a single line of music consisting of whole notes. The notes are positioned on the lines and spaces of the staff, corresponding to the letters of the lyrics: T, H, E, R, O, S, E, T, R, E, E, I, N, T, H, E, S, P, R, I, N, G, T, I, M, E, S, I, N, T, H, E, F, A, L, L, O, F, T, H, E, Y, E, A, R.



Start on the top three strings and move down one string at a time until you get to the sixth string, using either alternate or down-down-up picking. (If you'd rather listen to something more interesting than the open strings, feel free to hold down any six-string chord while you do this exercise.)

Because these crosspicking patterns are based on groups of three eighth notes, they don't fit evenly into a 4/4 measure. To make a tidy one-measure pattern, play through the three-note grouping twice and then add two more eighth notes—by string number, the

pattern goes 4-3-2, 4-3-2, 4-2. Try it in **Ex. 4** with alternate picking, and in **Ex. 5** with down-down-up picking. This asymmetrical pattern, Tuttle says, is “one of the things that gives crosspicking a cool, syncopated sound. When you're playing the melody, it gets a little displaced and sometimes gets put on the offbeats.”

Now take that one-measure pattern and practice moving it across the fingerboard, as in **Ex. 6**. Start on the sixth string, move to the treble side, and then go back down to the sixth string.

The crosspicking patterns thus far use what you might call a forward roll—they go low to high. You can also move in the other direction with a backward or reverse roll. In **Ex. 7**, the roll goes from the fourth string to the second and third, using alternate picking. In **Ex. 8**, play the same string pattern, but this time with down-up-up pick strokes.

This reverse roll, with its groupings of three, also needs to be adapted to fit into a single measure. **Ex. 9** shows a one-measure reverse roll using the down-up-up pattern, and **Ex. 10** is the same thing with alternate picking.

## WILDWOOD FLOWER

TRADITIONAL, ARRANGED BY MOLLY TUTTLE

The musical score for "Wildwood Flower" is presented in four systems, each with a guitar (Gtr) and mandolin (Mdn) part. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes chord markings (C, G, F) and fret numbers (0-3) for the mandolin part. The guitar part features a consistent crosspicking pattern of eighth notes. The mandolin part uses a similar pattern, often with triplets and slurs. The score is divided into measures by bar lines, with measure numbers 5, 10, and 15 indicated at the start of their respective systems.

**System 1 (Measures 1-4):** Chords C, G, C. Mandolin frets: 2-2-2-3, 0-1-0-2-1-0-1, 2-0-1-3-0-2-0, 0-0-0-2-0-0-0, 0-1-0-3-0-2.

**System 2 (Measures 5-8):** Chords G, C. Mandolin frets: 0-1-0-2-1-0-1, 2-0-1-3-0-2-0, 0-0-0-2-0-0-0, 0-1-0-3-0-2.

**System 3 (Measures 9-12):** Chords F, C. Mandolin frets: 0-1-0-2-1-0-1, 2-0-1-3-0-2-0, 2-1-1-2-1-2-1, 0-1-0-3-0-2.

**System 4 (Measures 13-16):** Chords G, C. Mandolin frets: 0-1-0-2-1-0-1, 2-0-1-3-0-2-0, 0-0-0-2-0-0-0, 0-1-0-3-0-2.

## TIME TO PLAY

Now try these techniques in a couple of songs. Tuttle's arrangement of "Wildwood Flower" uses a forward roll, as introduced in Exs. 1–6. You can crosspick the sections of eighth notes with either alternating pick strokes or down-up picking. For the quarter notes, use downstrokes. Throughout, your fretting fingers stay close to the basic G, C, and F chord shapes. Be sure to stay in position: Play all the notes on frets 1, 2, and 3 with your

first, second, and third fingers, respectively.

In "Worried Man Blues," Tuttle uses a reverse roll, as you practiced in Exs. 7–10. For the crosspicked eighth notes, use either alternate picking or down-up-up picking. Tuttle's arrangement spices things up with some hammer-ons (as in measures 5 and 13–16) and a couple of slides (measures 3, 11, and 12).

In both of these arrangements, the melodies fall on the lowest notes of the

crosspicked patterns—this is similar to Carter-style picking, where you play the melody in the bass and add strums on top. You can help the melody stand out more by picking the melody notes a little harder than the upper notes that fill out the pattern.

Once you're fluent with these basic patterns, you can apply them to all kinds of songs. Just hold down the chords, find the melody notes as close as possible to the chord shapes, and crosspick away.

## WORRIED MAN BLUES

TRADITIONAL, ARRANGED BY MOLLY TUTTLE

**G**

**C**

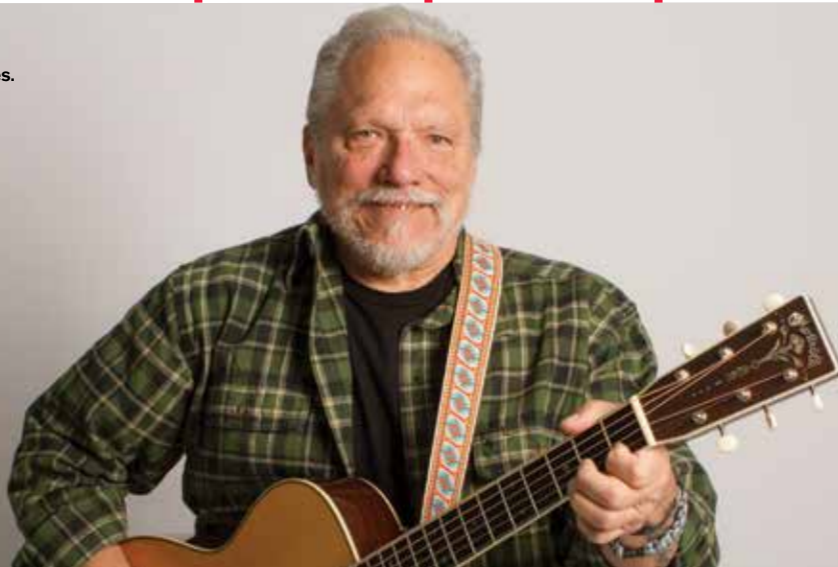
**G**

**D**

**G**



Jorma Kaukonen is known  
for his pick-hand techniques.



## THE BASICS

JOEY LUSTERMAN

# Best of Both Worlds

Jimmy Page does it. So does Jorma. 5 ways to learn hybrid picking

BY GRETCHEN MENN

## THE PROBLEM

You want to improve your abilities by learning hybrid picking—the simultaneous use of a flat-pick and fingers. This versatile technique is used across genres—guitarists from Jimmy Page to Jorma Kaukonen have made it an essential part of their acoustic work.

## THE SOLUTION

Work through a series of graduated exercises, starting with a basic hybrid-picking pattern, and highlighting some of the best applications for this technique: smooth arpeggios, piano-like chords with wide spacing, and singing lead lines.

### 1 START WITH ARPEGGIOS

Begin by holding your pick between your thumb and first finger. If you tend to hold your pick with two fingers and your thumb, this will require adjusting your normal grip. Start with alternating between downstrokes of your pick and notes played by your middle (*m*) and ring fingers (*a*). Exs. 1a through h are based around an open D chord. Hold down the chord, and let the notes ring through.

In Ex. 1a, the picked bass tones are played in quarter notes, positioned between eighth notes played by the fingers. Use this as an opportunity to hear the bass notes ring out against the two

upper voices. Move to all eighth notes in Ex. 1b. Note that the pattern is a grouping of 3-3-2. This gives some rhythmic interest as the bass notes fall on different places within the measure: downbeat, upbeat, downbeat.

Exs. 1c and d reverse the patterns of the first two examples, while Exs. 1e and f alternate between picked bass notes and notes played with the fingers. The pattern is transferred across strings in Ex. 1g, with the bass note moving from D to A, and the top voices moving from A and D to D and F#, respectively.

Ex. 1h introduces simultaneous bass and treble notes, played by the pick and the ring finger. Take your time to get used to the movement on these first easier exercises, as it will save you a lot of time learning the more complex ones. As always, use your ears and aim to get a good tone, balancing notes played by pick and fingers.

### 2 PUSH SOME PEDALS

Ex. 2 illustrates a basic example of moving bass notes against pedal points (constant notes) in the upper voices. You can take this concept much further and make it vastly more complex, but starting with something simple will help you develop a sense of separation between voices. Try to bring out the bass line—play it and *hear* it as the melody.

The natural difference in tone between pick and fingers will assist in accentuating that.

### 3 THINK LIKE A PIANIST

Hybrid picking allows for the simultaneous—or, more accurately, the specific—sounding of notes. As with classical fingerstyle or fingerpicking, in acoustic rock, each note is struck individually. You can choose to have the notes sound at the same time, or add separation by rolling the chords from lowest note to highest.

Ex. 3 is a progression in E minor that has the treble and bass voices widely spaced and moving at different times. Play all of the bass notes with your pick and all of the upper voices with your fingers. Make sure you hold all the notes for their full values—letting the bass notes ring out against the higher voices in the first two measures, and ensuring that the treble voices sustain as the bass moves in the second two measures.

### 4 GET BLUESY

A staple of the blues vocabulary—moving sixths—pairs perfectly with hybrid picking. Ex. 4 shows a typical use of descending sixths followed by a lead line, also hybrid-picked. In the first measure, hold down both notes and let them ring out against each other. Adding some vibrato will help it sound both more bluesy and more in-tune, as thirds and sixths are inherently a tiny bit out of tune with equal temperament (the tuning system favored by most Western music).

### 5 TAKE THE LEADS

Ex. 5a is a bluegrass-flavored use of hybrid picking. The character of this implies a



Ex. 1a

Ex. 1b

Ex. 1c

Ex. 1d

Ex. 1e

Ex. 1f

Ex. 1g

Ex. 1h

Ex. 2  
D

Bm

Ex. 3  
Em

C/E

D/F#

Ex. 4

Ex. 5a



## THE BASICS

faster tempo, but start slowly, and experiment with the different types of accenting. Try giving the pull-offs from the second-fret A to the open G string a more solid attack, for example. **Ex. 5b** uses hybrid picking to demystify a line that could be tricky. The first measure emphasizes groups of five; the second bar, groups of three. I recommend dividing this into two sections to get the different rhythmic patterns feeling fluid. Connect the sections only when you're comfortable with each one on its own.

These few examples barely scratch the surface of the wide and varied uses for hybrid picking, but they are a good foundation for improving your picking skills. The more you practice hybrid picking, the more you'll see opportunities to use it. With study of its various applications, hybrid picking can become an automatic part of your musical vocabulary. And it may open up creative possibilities and get you thinking in new ways, which is the most important benefit of learning a new technique.

With any new musical concept or

technique, as soon as you get the basics down, write with it. It can be a lick, a line, an entire song. The scope is less important than the integration. By coming up with something of your own, you ensure that the concept is becoming part of who you are as a musician.

*Gretchen Menn is a guitarist and composer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is a member of the popular Led Zeppelin tribute band Zepparella. This is one of an ongoing series on Acoustic Rock Explorations. [gretchenmenn.com](http://gretchenmenn.com)*

### Ex. 5b

Chords: Dmaj7, Em7, F#m7, Em7, B/D#, A/C#, A7/C#, D

Fret numbers: 7 8 10 8 7 5 5 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7

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9:30 PM STEVE LACY LOS ANGELES





Feeling good:  
Mary Flower

# How to Play the Guitar Rag ‘Jitters’

An introduction to fingerpicking Piedmont- and ragtime-style guitar

BY MARY FLOWER

**T**hrough the years, I’ve played all kinds of music, but in the 1980s, I focused heavily on blues and ragtime guitar. I was fortunate enough not just to meet some of my heroes, such as John Cephas and John Jackson, but to teach alongside them at many guitar camps. Working with these bluesmen helped cement my love for this feel-good music.

Ragtime originated in the late-19th century in Southern saloons and brothels, and peaked in popularity around 1917. The piano-based style ranged from the more elegant strains of Scott Joplin to the raunchier sounds of Jelly Roll Morton. In the 1920s and ’30s, such acoustic-blues guitarists as Blind Blake, Blind Boy Fuller, and Reverend Gary Davis emulated the catchy syncopation and alternating bass patterns characteristic of ragtime piano, not to mention the style’s improvisational feel.

Often called Piedmont guitar—after the East Coast regions, running from Virginia to North Carolina, where many of the players lived—this challenging style makes use of an

upbeat fingerpicking technique, which I’ll break down for you in this lesson.

## ONE PROGRESSION, THREE DIFFERENT KEYS

Start with a few simple options based on a familiar chord progression—I–VI–II–V—heard in classic tunes like the Band’s “Rag Mama Rag,” the traditional “Keep on Truckin’ Mama,” and Charlie Poole and the North Carolina Ramblers’ “Don’t Let Your Deal Go Down.” In **Ex. 1**, following a typical descending bass run, the progression is shown in the key of C major, but starting on the VI chord (A7) and ending on the I (C). Play the example fingerstyle. Pick the bass notes with your thumb and strum the chords with your index finger, or pick them with your index, middle, and ring fingers. Try this and all of the other examples slowly at first, gradually increasing the tempo as you gain confidence.

The same progression is transposed to G major in **Ex. 2**, which includes a chromatic

bass run in every other measure. In the last two measures there’s a turnaround—a series of chords or notes that usually signal the end of a section while serving as a smooth transition to the next section. Just as they do in blues and jazz, turnarounds appear commonly in ragtime.

In the key of F, **Ex. 3** kicks things up a notch with a more complex melody and syncopated rhythms. Work diligently at learning the syncopations, as they’re absolutely essential to ragtime. To play them accurately, count “one-and, two-and, three-and, four-and,” and so on, and pay close attention to where the notes fall. For instance, in bar 4, the second F is on the “and” of beat 1. Learning syncopations slowly will allow you to later play them effortlessly at full speed.

## GETTING ‘JITTERS’

Ragtime is a style that suits me well and continues to challenge me. I’ve included at least two original guitar rags on every album of mine. I first recorded “Jitters” with my friend

# WARM-UP EXERCISES

BY MARY FLOWER

Ex. 1

Ex. 1 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time, featuring a sequence of chords: A7, D7, G7, and C. The exercise is written for a single melodic line and a bass line.

**Chord Progression:** A7, D7, G7, C.

**Melodic Line:** The exercise begins with a sequence of eighth notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. This is followed by a series of chords: A7, D7, G7, and C. The melodic line continues with eighth notes: C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.

**Bass Line:** The bass line consists of a sequence of eighth notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. This is followed by a series of chords: A7, D7, G7, and C. The bass line continues with eighth notes: C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, C3.

Ex. 2

Ex. 2 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time, featuring a sequence of chords: E7, A7, D7, and G7. The exercise is written for a single melodic line and a bass line.

**Chord Progression:** E7, A7, D7, G7.

**Melodic Line:** The exercise begins with a sequence of eighth notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. This is followed by a series of chords: E7, A7, D7, and G7. The melodic line continues with eighth notes: C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.

**Bass Line:** The bass line consists of a sequence of eighth notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. This is followed by a series of chords: E7, A7, D7, and G7. The bass line continues with eighth notes: C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, C3.

Ex. 3

Ex. 3 is a guitar exercise in 4/4 time, featuring a sequence of chords: D7 and G7. The exercise is written for a single melodic line and a bass line.

**Chord Progression:** D7, G7.

**Melodic Line:** The exercise begins with a sequence of eighth notes: C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5. This is followed by a series of chords: D7 and G7. The melodic line continues with eighth notes: C5, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4, C4.

**Bass Line:** The bass line consists of a sequence of eighth notes: C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, A3, B3, C4. This is followed by a series of chords: D7 and G7. The bass line continues with eighth notes: C4, B3, A3, G3, F3, E3, D3, C3.



Chord progression: C7 F7

## JITTERS

BY MARY FLOWER

Intro

Chord progression: A7 D7 G7 G6 G<sup>aug</sup> G

Section A

Chord progression: G7 G G7

Section C

Chord progression: Edim7 G

Section D

Chord progression: D7 D<sup>aug</sup> G

Mark Vehrencamp on the sousaphone (on my 2011 CD, *Misery Loves Company*), but it works just as well as a standalone guitar piece. The tune has become a great source of inspiration for me, and I play it differently each time.

“Jitters” has a strong, funky feel and variations galore. Here I’ve notated the intro and the first two A sections, which fully demonstrate the use of syncopation and improvisation. Most of the chord grips should be familiar. However, there are some spots where you might use alternate fingerings: For the G/G7 chords in bars 5–8, for instance, play the low G, A#, and high G with, respectively, your second, third, and fourth fingers, freeing up your first finger to grab the F on string 1.

Note the use of a diminished seventh chord—Edim7 (bars 10 and 22)—a harmony that appears commonly in ragtime. There are a couple of different ways to fret that chord, but try 1, 3, 2, 4, lowest note to highest,

keeping your fourth finger held in place from the C chord in the preceding measure.

Both the intro and the second A section end with a turnaround on the I chord. Against the static third-fret G and open B string, a descending chromatic line of F–E–Eb adds harmonic interest. Fret the first-string G with your fourth finger, and play the descending line on string 4 starting with your third finger on the F, second on the E, and first on the Eb.

After you’ve completed this lesson, be sure to check out recordings of Piedmont guitar masters, including Etta Baker. Try coming up with some of your own ragtime exercises and pieces based on this lesson. And just remember: It’s all about the syncopation.

Mary Flower is a guitarist and teacher based in Portland, Oregon. For more of her ragtime lessons, check out her instructional DVD *Fingerstyle Ragtime Guitar*, available at [maryflower.com](http://maryflower.com).

## ESSENTIAL RAGTIME GUITAR ALBUMS

**Blind Blake:** *All the Published Sides* (JSP)

**Blind Boy Fuller:** *Complete Recorded Works* (Document Records)

**John Cephas and Phil Wiggins:** *Dog Days of August* (Flying Fish)

**John Jackson:** *Front Porch Blues* (Alligator Records)

**David Laibman and Eric Schoenberg:** *The New Ragtime Guitar* (Folkways Records)

**Reverend Gary Davis:** *Demons and Angels* (Shanachie)

**A1**

**G7**

**C**

**Edim7**

**G**

**E7**

**A7**

**D7**

**G7**

**G6**

**Gaug**

**G**

# Good Reads

4 ways to improve your sightreading

BY RON JACKSON



Ron Jackson

The ability to read music is a skill that even some of the most brilliant acoustic guitarists lack. Steve Howe and James Taylor, for example, are both self-taught musicians and learned by ear rather than by reading music. The same goes for Paul McCartney. Playing by ear is a great skill to have, but being able to read music is an asset that will take you to the next level as a guitarist. Not only will it help you to be more flexible and fluent in a variety of different contexts, it will allow you to interact more easily with musicians who play other instruments.

Reading standard notation—without the help of tablature—is like learning a new language. The more you're exposed to it and practice in different situations, the better you get. In this Weekly Workout, I'll give you real-life examples of what I see when I'm playing with a jazz band, in a Broadway pit, or in a recording session.

The only way you'll learn how to read notation is practicing, just as much as you work on learning melodies, riffs, and chord progressions. There's an old saying that goes, "You can't read what you've never seen before."

Take this to heart as you work through this lesson.

## You can't read what you've never seen before.

### WEEK ONE

This week, brush up on the basics of reading music: pitches, time signatures, key signatures, and note values. Guitar music is written in the treble clef and sounds an octave lower than written. Ex. 1 shows the natural notes—those without sharps or flats—on each string up to the 12th fret.

You'll often see accidentals (sharps, flats, and naturals) that modify the notes you play. For instance, you might play the G in Ex. 2 on string 1, fret 3. The first accidental, the sharp (#) tells you to raise the G by a half step (the equivalent of one fret), so play it on string 1, fret 4. Oppositely, the flat sign (b), tells you to lower the G by a half step, so play it on fret 2 of that string.

You should also know about *enharmonic* equivalents. Since there isn't a natural note in between B and C, nor between E and F, B# is the same note as C and E# is the same note as F; Cb is identical to B, and the same goes for Fb and E.

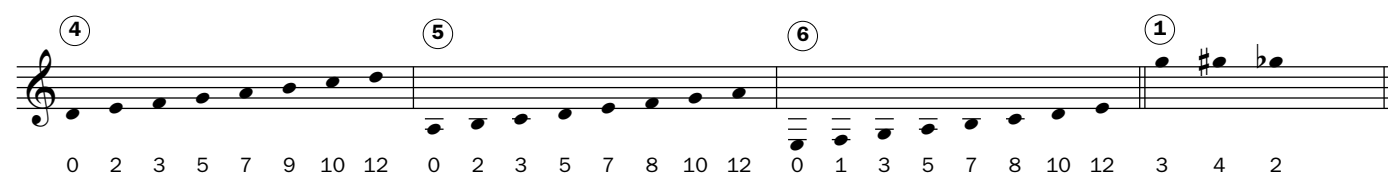
The number of sharps or flats in a piece determine its major or minor key. Ex. 3a depicts the order of sharps—F#, C#, G#, D#, A#, E#, and B#—and the sharp keys. If you haven't already done so, memorize the keys and the number of sharps in each one, and do the same thing with the order of flats (Bb, Eb, Ab, Db, Gb, Cb).

### WEEK 1

#### Ex. 1

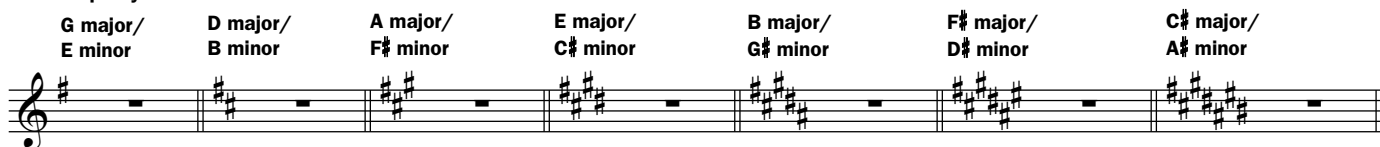


#### Ex. 2



#### Ex. 3a

##### Sharp Keys



#### Ex. 3b

##### Flat Keys







Cb, Fb) and the flat keys, as shown in **Ex. 3b**. You might've noticed the absence of C major/A minor. That's of course because these keys contain no sharps or flats.

**Ex. 4** shows a handful of common time signatures—used to show how many beats there are in each measure and the note value given to each beat. (More on note values in a moment.) In the first three, the top number indicates the beats and the bottom note indicates the note value. So in a measure of 4/4, there are four quarter notes; 3/4, three quarter notes; and 2/4, two quarter notes.

Another name for 4/4 is common time, and so sometimes you'll find a C for a time

signature instead of 4/4. Then there's cut time—two half notes per bar—indicated by a C with a line through it. In a bar of the last time signature here, 6/8, there are six eighth notes.

Remind yourself of note values in **Ex. 5**. As you can see, the whole note takes up four beats; the half note, two beats; and the quarter note, one beat. There are two eighth notes or four 16th notes in a beat. **Ex. 6** shows an assortment of rests. Remember, these are the opposite of notes; they call for silence.

**Ex. 7** depicts ties—curved lines between notes of the same pitch, indicating that they are to be held for the length of both notes. In a pair of tied notes, only the first note is played. For instance, in bar 1, play a B on the “and” of beat 2 and let it ring through beat 3; play the B on beat 4 of bar 2, and let it ring through beat 1 of the last measure.

Finish this week by refreshing yourself on the most common dotted note values. As demonstrated in **Ex. 8**, a note followed by a dot adds one half of the value to its length. In other words, a dotted half note is a half plus a quarter; a dotted quarter, a quarter plus an eighth; and a dotted eighth, an eighth plus a 16th.

## WEEK TWO

Now delve into some real-life reading situations. I'm often presented with chord symbols, but not specific voicings or rhythms. **Ex. 9** is a swing progression I encountered on a recent gig and two ways I might approach it. The first four bars start with the Cmaj7 chord rooted on the fifth string; in the second four bars the chord is rooted on the sixth string, for a slightly darker timbre. In terms of rhythm, for a situation like this I like to keep things simple and play four quarter-note strums per bar, with accents on beats 2 and 4.

Sometimes the chord symbols include specific rhythms, like in **Ex. 10**—the last eight bars of a 12-bar blues in the key of F major. Try plugging in all of the different moveable seventh-chord voicings at your command. This

## Beginners' Tip #1

Reading music is a language of repetition and memorization. Spend a good amount of time internalizing a new rhythm, and then whenever you see it, you'll automatically know how to play it.

## Beginners' Tip #2

Make reading a part of your everyday practice routine and it will soon improve dramatically.

### Ex. 4

#### Time Signatures



### Ex. 5

#### Whole Note

#### Half Notes

#### Quarter Notes

#### Eighth Notes

#### 16th Notes



### Ex. 6

#### Whole Rest

#### Half Rest

#### Quarter Rest

#### Eighth Rest

#### 16th Rest

### Ex. 7

#### Ties



### Ex. 8

#### Dotted Notes

#### Dotted half = half + quarter

#### Dotted quarter = half + eighth

#### Dotted eighth = eighth + 16th



## WEEK 2

## Ex. 9

Ex. 9 displays two rows of guitar fretboard diagrams and corresponding musical notation. Each diagram shows a specific chord voicing with fingerings and barre positions indicated.

**Row 1:**

- Cmaj7**: x1324x
- C#dim7**: x2314x
- Dm7**: x1312x, 5 fr.
- G7**: Tx132x
- Em7b5**: x1324x, 7 fr.
- A7**: Tx132x, 5 fr.
- Gm7**: 2x333x
- G7**: Tx132x

**Row 2:**

- Cmaj7**: 1x342x, 8 fr.
- C#dim7**: 2x131x, 8 fr.
- Dm7**: 2x333x, 10 fr.
- G9**: x2134x, 9 fr.
- Em7b5**: 2x341x, 11 fr.
- A7#9**: x2134x, 11 fr.
- Gm7**: x1312x, 10 fr.
- G7**: x1314x, 10 fr.

The musical notation below each row consists of a single staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature, showing the rhythmic pattern for each chord.

## Ex. 10

Ex. 10 displays a musical staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The staff contains a sequence of chords and notes, with some notes marked with a diamond symbol.

**Chord Progression:**

- Bb7
- F7
- E7
- Eb7
- D7
- G7
- C7
- F7
- D7
- G7
- C7

## WEEK 3

## Ex. 11

Ex. 11 displays a musical staff with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The staff contains a sequence of chords and notes, with some notes marked with a diamond symbol.

**Chord Progression:**

- G
- Am
- D7
- To Coda
- 1 Bm
- Em7
- Am7b5
- D7
- 2 Bm7
- Am7
- D7
- G
- F7
- Bb
- Cm7
- F7
- Eb
- F7
- Bb
- C
- D7
- Coda
- G
- Em7
- Am7
- D7
- G
- D7
- G

The musical notation includes dynamic markings: *mf*, *mp*, *f*, and *mp*.



week's takeaway is that the more you know about fretboard harmony, the better off you'll be when reading at a gig or studio session.

### WEEK THREE

This week, I'll share what I might find on my music stand at a Broadway show. When presented with a lead sheet similar to **Ex. 11**, I first check the time signature—4/4—and then the key signature. I notice that the piece starts in the key of G major and modulates to B♭ in bar 7.

I then inspect the range of the melody, which helps me determine which position to play it in. Scanning through the music up to the second ending, I see that the lowest note is the A below the middle staff line and the highest note is the A just above the staff. So, I would play this in second position, with the A in bar 1 on string 3, fret 2; the B on the fourth fret of the same string; etc. When the music modulates to B♭, I would go for fifth position. Experiment, though, to see which positions work best for you.

As for the chords, the music on a chart like this doesn't specify the exact voicings, so I'll grab whatever grip is close by. For

example, I would play the G chord either open or at the third fret—whatever helps me move the most smoothly between playing the melody and the chordal accents.

**Ex. 11** shows dynamic markings: *Mf* (*mezzo-forte*) calls for the music to be played moderately loud, *mp* (*mezzo-piano*) indicates moderately soft, and *f* (*forte*) is loud. And then there's the road map. After you play through the first four bars, as directed by the repeat sign (:), play bars 1 and 2 again, but this time skip to the second ending (bar 5). Also, *D.C. al Coda* (meaning from the head to the tail) tells you to go to the beginning of the music (the *capo*) and continue until you see the sign at bar 2 that directs you to the ending (the *coda*).

### WEEK FOUR

Sometimes I encounter music written for the guitar that gets specific in terms of voicings, like in **Ex. 12**. Without chord symbols, frames, or any other clues, I have to read the music in real time. I always take a good look at the music before I play it. In this case, you'll see that these are all common open chords: Em, C, G, and D. With experience and repetition, you'll recognize these chords at a quick glance.

**Ex. 13** is similar to what I might see on a gig where I'm asked to play in the gypsy-jazz style. When beginning to learn reading, guitarists often play things in a low position with open strings, but to be able to give the melody the right feeling and to add vibrato, I like to work in a higher position. I'd play

this example in fifth position, starting with the A on string 4, fret 7. It's also important to know the style of the piece you're reading. Since it's jazz, I would play **Ex. 13** with a swing feel and also embellish the melody in ways not written on the page.

When I'm asked to bust out the nylon-string guitar, I might be handed music that looks like **Ex. 14**, which is inspired by the classical literature. Scan through the music and you'll see that in the first five bars the upstemmed notes are based on a D chord, while the bass notes move around. If you're fluent in reading you'll immediately recognize that the D chord can be played with an open grip. Spend some time in the woodshed with reading, and before long you'll be playing chords without needing their symbols or frames.

Ron Jackson is a New York City-based master jazz guitarist, composer, arranger, producer, and educator who's played with Taj Mahal, Jimmy McGriff, Randy Weston, Ron Carter, and many others. Find more of Jackson's lessons at [practicejazzguitar.com](http://practicejazzguitar.com).

## Beginners' Tip #3

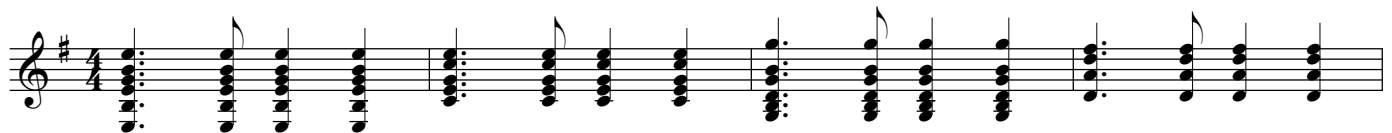
Don't practice sightreading using something you've heard before. You might think you're reading it, when in fact you're relying on your ear to play it.

## Beginners' Tip #4

Use a metronome to learn how to accurately read and feel rhythms, not to mention track your progress as you increase your speed.

### WEEK 4

Ex. 12



Ex. 13



Ex. 14







# A Bluegrass Breakdown

Here's how to play the timeless 'Walls of Time'

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



Peter Rowan

When he introduces "Walls of Time" in concert, Peter Rowan likes to tell the story of its origin. As a member of Bill Monroe and the Blue Grass Boys in the mid-1960s, Rowan took long treks on Monroe's touring bus, which was nicknamed the Bluegrass Breakdown.

Early one morning the bus actually did break down. Stranded on the side of the highway, Rowan watched the sunrise as his boss emerged from the bus and sang him a melody. In the moments that followed, Monroe and Rowan wrote "Walls of Time" together right on the spot.

Rowan has revisited the song a number of times over the years, always sung in his

high-lonesome tenor, and it's been covered by Ricky Skaggs, Emmylou Harris, and many others. This arrangement is based on the version Rowan and Monroe recorded in 1968, available on *Classic Bluegrass Vol. 2* (Smithsonian Folkways). Rowan plays the song with a capo at the third fret, causing the music to sound a minor third higher than fingered (and written). The tune's two chords—A and D—sound as C and F.

"Walls of Time" is based on a repeating 16-bar form, used for the intro, verses, choruses, and interludes. (On the original recording, Monroe and Rowan add a measure to the intro.) As shown in the notation, Rowan

populates this form with boom-chuck strumming—bass notes on beats 1 and 3 and strums on 2 and 4.

Use confident downstrokes when boom-chucking, and occasionally throw in an upstroke strum on the "and" of the beat (not shown in notation). Use the suggested fret-hand fingerings for the walk-ups.

Once you have a good handle on the form as notated here, feel free to vary the placement of the walk-ups, or the chord voicings, as Rowan does on the recording. This will help keep your performance of "Walls of Time"—or any tune for that matter—from feeling stilted. **AG**

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 "They sparkle! and they last 4x longer than regular strings"  
 -Melissa Etheridge

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## Capo III

(music sounds a minor third higher than written)

## Global Accompaniment Pattern

A

fret-hand  
fingering: 1 2 3

D

A

D

A

## Intro

A

D

A

D A

A

1. The wind is blowing 'cross the mountains

D

And out on the valley way below

A

It sweeps the grave of my darling

D

When I die that's where I want to go

## Chorus

A

Lord, send the angels for my darling

D

And take her to that home on high

A

I'll wait my time out here on earth, love

D

A

And come to you when I die

Interlude (use Verse/Chorus progression)

3. I hear a voice out in the darkness  
It moans and whispers through the pines  
I know it's my sweetheart a calling  
I hear her through the walls of time

Repeat Chorus

Interlude (use Verse/Chorus progression)

4. Our names are carved upon the tombstone  
I promised you before you died  
Our love will bloom forever, darling  
When we rest side by side

Repeat Chorus

# Borrow from the Best

**Bert Jansch's classic arrangement of the traditional tune 'Blackwaterside' incorporates tricky metric shifts**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

**A** Los Angeles judge recently exonerated Jimmy Page on charges of “stealing” the intro to Spirit’s “Taurus” for Led Zeppelin’s “Stairway to Heaven,” but there’s no doubt the famed guitarist had a habit of “borrowing” from songs he liked. Take “Down by Blackwaterside,” an old folk song the influential British fingerstylist Bert Jansch recorded as “Blackwaterside” on his 1966 album *Jack Orion*. Jansch credited the song as a “traditional.” Page liked Jansch’s adaptation so much that he recorded a similar version, without vocals, for Led Zeppelin’s self-titled debut album of 1969. Page, of course, took full credit for the instrumental “Black Mountain Side.”

I have transcribed Jansch’s version of “Down by Blackwaterside,” whose lyrics tell the story of a woman who has been duped by a suitor. Jansch

plays the piece in drop-D tuning in the key of D major, with a fourth-fret capo that causes it to sound in F# major. You can learn the song with a capo, or, for a darker tonality, without one.

One of the most difficult—and subtle—aspects of “Blackwaterside” is Jansch’s tendency to add or subtract a beat or portion of a beat—an effect you often see in solo country-blues. Sometimes it’s straightforward enough—for example, in bar 5 Jansch modulates from 4/4 to 2/4. Other times are less obvious: In bar 7, Jansch subtracts an eighth note, putting the measure in 7/8 time.

The best way to internalize the rhythms in this piece is to subdivide—feel the music in eighth notes instead of quarters. It would be beneficial to practice counting the piece before you even pick up your guitar. Use a metronome

so you avoid speeding up or slowing down when moving among the different meters.

In terms of technique, “Blackwaterside” isn’t overly difficult. Just make sure that your hammer-on/pull-off moves—often in 16th-note triplets (three 16ths in the space normally occupied by two)—come off smoothly and at equal volume. As for the pick hand, remember to pick the notes on strings 6 to 4 with your thumb, and the notes on the higher strings with your index, middle, and ring fingers.

Once you’ve mastered Jansch’s evocative arrangement of “Down by Blackwaterside,” come up with one of your own. Although his loose, improvisatory vocal phrasing is a selling point, the song also works well as an instrumental.

Just ask Jimmy Page.

AC



Bert Jansch

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Tuning: D A D G B E

Capo IV

## Intro

D A/c# D

let ring throughout

C G/B

D C D G7 D G7

## Verse

D G7 D A/c# D

1., 6. One morn - ing fair \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_  
2. See additional lyrics

# BLACKWATERSIDE

12 **C**

took the air down the black, black

15 **G/B D C D G7**

wa - ter - side.

18 **D G D G/B D**

'Twas in gaz - ing all, all a - round me

21 **D G/D D G7**

the I - rish lad I spied.

24

**D** **G7** **1-5.** **D** **G7** **D**

All through the

6.

27

*P.M.* *P.M.* *sim.*

30

2. All for the fore part of that night  
 We lay in sport and play  
 Till this young man arose and gathered his clothes  
 Saying, "Fare thee well today"

### 3. Instrumental

4. That's not the promise that you gave to me  
 When first you lay on my breast  
 You could make me believe with your lying tongue  
 That the sun rose in the west

5. Well then go home to your father's garden  
 Go home and weep your fill  
 And think on your own misfortune  
 That you've wrought with your wanton will



# Sonic Hunting & Gathering

Laura Marling does her own thing while tipping her hat to Bob Dylan

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER



Laura Marling

In the video to Laura Marling's "Master Hunter," the English singer-songwriter sits in the shadows, singing and playing guitar while a libidinous dance goes down alongside her. From a guitarist's perspective, Marling's idiosyncratic technique is just as interesting as the wild dancers, her pick hand fluttering about the strings, hummingbird-like.

No matter what type of picking approach you use, "Master Hunter," from 2013's *Once I Was an Eagle*, is satisfying to play. The song is built from four basic chords—the I, III, IV, and V (C, E, F, and G in the key of C)—and is played in open-C tuning (low to high: C G C G C E). It recalls some of the

open-tuned pieces of Bob Dylan, whom Marling references in the lyrics ("It ain't me, babe.")

On the recording, Marling tends to decorate extended C-chord passages (those greater than four bars) by playing different fretted notes against the ringing open strings. She uses notes from the C-Mixolydian mode (C D E F G A B $\flat$ ), with the minor third (E $\flat$ ), often pulled off to the open sixth string, thrown in for bluesy effect.

Marling's accompaniment has a spontaneous feel, so try improvising your own accompaniment patterns when playing "Master Hunter." Begin by learning the note palette shown here in the first bar of notation. In each octave pair,

fret the lower note with your second finger and the higher one with your third.

The music in the next two bars depicts a pattern using these notes, similar to what Marling plays in the intro, using the same two-finger grip throughout. Pitted against the ringing open strings, the fretted notes create a sound that's texturally and harmonically colorful.

In learning the passage, use whatever picking approach and combination of pick strokes feels most natural for you. Play similar figures wherever you see a C-chord symbol in the arrangement, and any 16th-note-based strumming pattern will do for the other chords. **AC**

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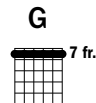
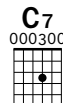
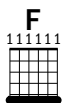
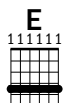
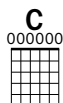
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Tuning: C G C G C E

## Chords



## Intro

C

play three times

etc.

## Intro

C

C

1. I am a master hunter  
I cured my skin, now nothing gets in  
Nothing not as hard as it tries

E

F

You want a woman 'cause you want to be saved

C

Well I'll tell you that I got a little lot on my plate

E

F

C

You want a woman who will call your name, it ain't me babe  
No, no, no, it ain't me babe

C

2. I don't stare at water anymore  
Water doesn't do what it did before
- E F C
- It took me in into the edge of insane when I only meant to swim
- E F C
- I nearly put a bullet in my brain when the rhythm took me in  
I am a master hunter

C

3. You let men into your bed  
Do they not know you well  
They can't get into my head  
They don't have a hope in hell

E

F

You see the thing is we are so alone

C

There's nothing we can share

E

F

C

You can get me on the telephone but you won't keep me there  
No, no, no, you won't keep me there

## Bridge

C7

Take me somewhere I can grow  
Give me something let me go  
Tell me something I don't know  
I have some news  
I have some news  
Is this what you think I do  
In life when I'm not being used  
You say you're not sad, you look for the blues  
You're not sad, you look for the blues  
I have some news

G

F

Wrestling the rope from darkness is no f\*\*king life that I would choose

## Outro

C

I am a master hunter  
I cured my skin, now nothing gets in  
Nothing not as hard as it tries  
I am a master, I am a master  
I am a master hunter

# Trekking, Like the Do-Dah Man

A stranger at a trade show inspires Tim Farrell's open-E jaunt 'The Backpacker'

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

In 2008, fingerstyle great Tim Farrell was doing a little warm-up idea before taking the stage at that year's NAMM Show when a random stranger walked up and said, "Keep playing that!" The stranger, playing an odd little instrument, jammed along for a moment before quickly disappearing into the crowd.

Farrell later learned the mysterious picker was Bob McNally, inventor of Martin's Backpacker guitar, and that his instrument was another McNally creation, the Strum Stick. The interaction stuck with Farrell and he expanded the original warm-up into a full piece, named for McNally's most well-known instrument.

To play "The Backpacker" in the vibrant open E (E B E G# B E), tune your third string up a half step and your fourth and fifth strings up a whole step. If you normally play in standard tuning and use heavy strings, this might be too much additional tension on your guitar's neck, so you could play it in open D (D A D F# A D). Use a capo at the second fret if you want the song to sound in E.

The main melody of "The Backpacker" is a descending phrase played in several variations, mixing fretted notes, open notes, and harmonics, and using slightly different harmonizations in each variation. Key to playing the tune well

is using an economy of fret-hand movement, keeping your fingers in place as long as possible and letting the notes ring together. Take things slowly at first, perhaps penciling in the fingerings that best help you achieve this goal.

Farrell concedes that he fights a tendency to rush the piece, so the challenge for you will be to play it with energy and vigor, liltily, but not overly fast. Also think about dynamics. Start phrases softly and gradually get louder toward their cadences. That's not only a good strategy for adding expressiveness to your performance of "The Backpacker," it's a good one for any other piece in your repertoire. **AC**



Tim Farrell

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# THE BACKPACKER

BY TIM FARRELL

Tuning: E B E G# B E

Liltingly

let ring throughout

# THE BACKPACKER

17

20

Harm.

24

\*Fermata on repeat only.

\*\*Low E on repeat only.

28

32

37

\*Fermata on repeat only.

41

\*\*Harm. \*\*Through bar 46 (diamond noteheads only).

45

49

53



80

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**New Gear**  
PK Thompson's  
latest dreadnought

# AG TRADE

Shubb's latest capo is a  
blast from the past.

## MAKERS & SHAKERS

MICHAEL AMSLER

# Turn of the Screw

Shubb's new capo goes back to the future

BY PATRICK SULLIVAN

**I**t's been four decades, but Rick Shubb still remembers the life-changing moment with crystal clarity. "I closed it on the neck of a guitar and I said, 'This is it—this is magic,'" the California inventor, manufacturer, and musician recalls. "In that one second, I knew we had it."

Back in 1974, Shubb and his partner Dave Coontz came up with a revolutionary design for a capo—the clamp guitarists use to change an instrument's pitch by reducing string length. Shubb, a professional banjo player and teacher, was frustrated by the cumbersome capos then in use. He and Coontz

replaced the standard screw-on system with a lever-operated, over-center locking approach. Their capos were easier to put on and reduced the risk of strings being pulled out of tune. When the partners applied the concept to a guitar capo, which is known for narrow non-intrusive profile, they sparked a revolution. More than five million Shubb capos later, the design has become standard issue.

So why on Earth did Shubb recently introduce a screw-on capo?

"I'm probably more surprised than anyone," Shubb says with a laugh, during an

interview at the company's Northern California offices. "But I've been playing around with the idea for a long time."

The Shubb Fine Tune Capo is a U-shaped device with a sleek, rounded look and innovative features. The adjusting knob, which can tweak the capo's tension, for example, has six numbered surfaces aimed at making it easier to reliably reproduce your ideal pressure on the strings. But at the product's core is a screw.

Why go that route, given how badly such devices frustrated Shubb decades ago?

"The motivation was that there has always

been a certain set of players who prefer a screw-on capo," Shubb says. "It's almost a cultural thing, especially among bluegrass musicians."

Some players, Shubb acknowledges, simply trust the screw mechanism and feel it gives them more control. Case in point: noted bluegrass guitarist Herb Pedersen.

"We're buddies, but he wasn't using my capo," Shubb says. "He said, 'If you ever make one like that I'm on board in a minute.' I think that pushed me over the line."

The company officially launched the Shubb Fine Tune Capo earlier last year. For now, Shubb is marketing it online and in a few stores.

"It's targeted at a pretty specific user—bluegrass players and people who have decided that's the kind of capo they want," Shubb says.

Pedersen, for example, loves it.

Shubb himself doesn't use it. "I did test-drive it," he says. "But I don't use it in performances. I like my original."

**'If you'd asked me about where my life was going when I was in my 20s, I would have guessed that I would continue playing music and eventually have a career as a graphic artist'**

**RICK SHUBB**

Still, maybe the new capo shouldn't be that surprising. Shubb's whole career has been based on a willingness to take chances. The original Shubb Capo sprang from his collaboration with Coontz, an auto mechanic taking banjo lessons from Shubb. The two men put together banjo capos at the auto shop where Coontz worked. "We'd eat at Denny's and then work until midnight or so," Shubb recalls.

Shubb had never thought of himself as a businessman. A talented bluegrass player, he performed with the likes of guitarist Doc Watson and mandolin master David Grisman—and even roomed with Jerry Garcia. He also loved to draw rock posters and underground comics. "If you'd asked me about where my life was going when I was in my 20s, I would have guessed that I would continue playing music and eventually have a career as a graphic artist," he says.

Even after the pair started selling capos by mail, the business operated out of Shubb's childhood home in Oakland, California. "I was moving around a lot, so my mom did the shipping and answered the mail," Shubb says.

Shubb tried to get larger companies interested

in his design, but nobody bit. That's one reason the company's success caught him by surprise. He vividly recalls the surge of pride at seeing legendary musicians begin using the invention.

"I was watching TV and Chet Atkins came on," he says. "He took out a Shubb capo and put it on his guitar. He didn't even check his tuning—just started playing."

These days, Shubb has facilities in Rohnert Park, California, and Missouri. Coontz is no longer a partner, but he is still involved in production. About 80 percent of the company's capos are now made by a

special factory in China. "It's a dedicated shop run by a friend of mine," Shubb says. "The quality control is amazing. We started shipping directly from there after we had a zero rejection rate for two years."

And at age 71, Shubb is still planning new products. He continues to perform and think of himself as a musician, but the company is his life.

"It's what I do all day, every day," he says. "When I see the capos in use, in the hands of fabulous players, I feel like I'm participating in the performance. That really makes me proud."

**AG**

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# A Clean Slate

Maintaining or repairing a dirty finish takes a bit of know-how (and elbow grease)

BY MAMIE MINCH

## GENTLE READERS,

I've noticed a trend in write-in questions recently, and it was so overwhelming I thought I should talk about it: it's all about the finishes on your guitars. People seem to be nervous about whether they're caring for the finish on their guitar properly; how much attention they should be giving it; and what that might look like. I thought I'd answer a couple of your questions to give you a better idea of the things you can change, the things you can't change, and the wisdom to know when to visit the repair shop.

Here goes!

**Q:** *How should I clean a 1966 Gibson Dove acoustic guitar? The surface shows fingerprints, palm marks, etc.*

*Thank you, Mary*

**A:** Great question, and I'm happy to say that the answer is pretty straightforward. Fingerprints, palm marks, and

smudges on the surface of a nitrocellulose finish are easy to deal with. Of course, the higher the gloss, or the shinier the finish, the more visible they are, but the easier they are to get off. To offer some perspective, little smudges aren't bad for the short-term health of the finish, but anything with a Ph that's a bit acidic—including sweat and oils from your skin—can cumulatively dull a finish over time.

First, try buffing the surface by hand with a paper towel or soft cotton cloth (an old t-shirt works great). Often the smudges will just rub off. If the sweat and oils aren't coming up or are smearing around, try this: Put just a dot of mild dish soap in a bowl with some warm—not hot—water. With that old t-shirt, lightly wash the area. You'll want to take care not to leave standing water on the surface of the guitar, so either just get the cloth a little bit wet, or have a second dry cloth in your other hand and dry it off as you go, working on just a patch at a time. The soap and warmth of the water will cut any oiliness from

your skin, or whatever the dirt is made of.

If your dirt is tougher than soap and water can deal with, using a little polish is fine. In our shop, I use automotive scratch remover—it's not silicone based, which you'll want to avoid. Less is more with guitar polish. Most of them are wax-based, so be aware that if your guitar has scratches or pits, those may trap a bit of the wax and the appearance of the scratch or pit can be visually highlighted—this is why you'll want to go lightly with polish, and always try wiping or washing the guitar first.

**Q:** *My 1960s Martin D-18 is a great guitar. It's in pretty good shape, too, but there's a cloudy spot in the finish where my arm reaches over the guitar. Can I use guitar polish to remove it?*  
*Thanks, George*

**A:** What you're dealing with is a pretty common issue. Over time, body heat and moisture can affect the finish in that spot—it's a classic complaint, honestly. Unfortunately, polish doesn't tend to do much with blush, which is what this is called. Moisture gets trapped in the nitro finish, causing it to appear cloudy or discolored. Your repair person may be able to make it appear better. They could use a "blush remover" that re-amalgamates the finish, and do a little buffing on the wheel. No promises here, though—this may always be part of the charming patina of your particular guitar.

*Mamie Minch is the co-owner of Brooklyn Lutherie. She is the former head of repair at Retrofret Guitars and an active blues player.*

## ON A SIDE NOTE

In the repair shop, I sometimes get a diamond in the rough—a vintage Martin or Gibson flattop that's hung on the wall for 50 years in a smoker's living room. What looks like a dingy, yellowed, forlorn thing can prove to be a real dazzler underneath that oily coating of built-up smoke (composed of tar, nicotine, and thousands of other chemicals). The lucky tech who gets the job of cleaning it will have a telltale pile of yellow shop rags and one Popeye bicep by the time the job is done, but it can really be worth the effort!



Mamie Minch

## GOT A QUESTION?

Uncertain about guitar care and maintenance? The ins-and-outs of guitar building? Or a topic related to your gear?

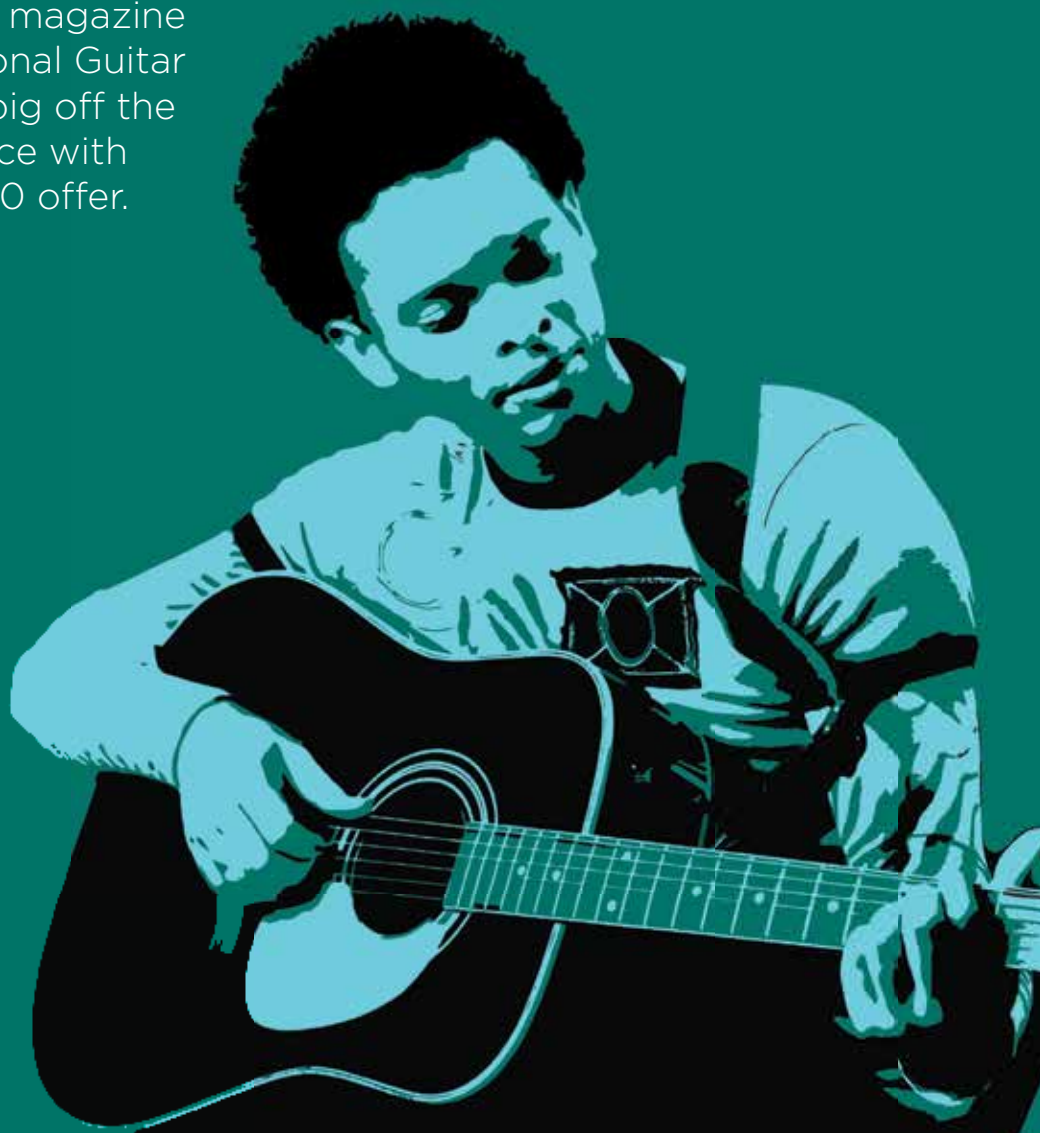
Ask *Acoustic Guitar's* resident repair expert Mamie Minch. Send an email titled "Repair Expert" to editor Greg Cahill at [greg.cahill@stringletter.com](mailto:greg.cahill@stringletter.com), and he'll forward it to Mamie.

If AG selects your question for publication, you'll receive a complimentary copy of AG's *The Acoustic Guitar Owner's Manual*.



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# A Hi-Tech Tonal Breakthrough

**Breedlove's innovative sound profiling, new Concerto shape, and all-myrtlewood body team up for stunning results**

BY GREG CAHILL

**W**ith the recent introduction of the all-myrtlewood Breedlove Concerto, the Oregon-based guitar company became the first large-scale US manufacturer to incorporate this intriguing tonewood in a production line of instruments. But the Concerto also is distinctive for another reason: Breedlove owner Tom Bedell and his team of guitar designers have created a new body shape—which tapers from an impressive five inches deep at the endpin to just under four inches at the joint of the hard-rock maple neck—that produces a big, beau-

tiful sound when coupled with all of that cool, coastal myrtlewood and the company's computer-aided sound profiling.

The result is impressive, given the complexity of the Concerto's tone. "Two years ago, we began the journey of designing a new guitar body shape that would have a bigger sound than dreadnoughts and deliver a more complex, textured tone," Bedell told *AG* recently. "The breakthrough came when we embraced the unique variability in every tonewood set, replacing cookie-cutter, standard wood dimensions with

frequency-tuned tops and backs. "I still can't get over how incredible these sound."

This isn't the first all-myrtlewood guitar from Breedlove, but it is the first all-myrtlewood production model in their line of 2017 Big Sound instruments, which use sound profiling to maximize the instruments' tonal palette. According to the company's literature, the goal of the technology is to advance the creation and projection of sound and complexity of tone by working with—instead of against—the variability in the woods from forests around the world.

---

## AT A GLANCE

### BREEDLOVE MYRTLEWOOD CONCERTO

#### BODY

Solid myrtlewood top, back, and sides;  
black binding; ebony bridge

#### NECK

Hard-rock maple; ebony fretboard;  
1 3/4-inch nut width

#### EXTRAS

LR Baggs EAS VTC pickup; hardshell  
case; Handcrafted in Bend, Oregon;  
[breedlovemusic.com](http://breedlovemusic.com)

---





Since tonewoods can vary substantially among species, within trees of the same species, and within an individual tree, Breedlove reasoned that the woods harvested from each tree has, what it calls, a unique life-span experience—there is as much as a 30-percent variance in the density and frequency of tonewood cut to the same dimension within the same tree, the company's literature notes. "Most guitar production companies ignore these complex inconsistencies," Breedlove asserts on its website, "cutting their tops and backs to a uniform, pre-determined dimension. At Breedlove, we embraced a far more complicated process, setting a new standard aimed at getting the most music out of every instrument we build. We have learned to capitalize on variation, developing exclusive technology: Breedlove sound profiling."

Here's how it works: Breedlove builders activate the analysis by tapping a tonewood set,

## **'Tonally, if rosewood and maple were to have a baby, it would be Myrtlewood!'**

**DEVIN PURCELL, BREEDLOVE  
GLOBAL SALES DIRECTOR**

a common practice among luthiers. But at Breedlove, the resulting frequencies are captured in a computer program. Through this analysis, the company learns precisely the thinness to target for each soundboard to reach a designated frequency.

Ideally pairing the top with the back requires backs that have undergone sound profiling to a targeted weight to achieve that higher frequency. The ultimate goal, the company says, is a Fundamental Resonance Frequency that maximizes the instrument's efficiency in producing pronounced

sound and a more textured tone. "Amazingly, we have achieved both a bigger sound and projection," the company's literature concludes, "but also more beautiful-sounding, complex notes."

Simply strumming an open-D chord produces a richly textured sound rife with warm overtones the likes of which I have not experienced in a production guitar. "Myrtlewood is a phenomenal tonewood to have at our disposal—because the wood is visually stunning and every piece is unique, the tone is a luthier's dream," Devin Percell, Breedlove Global Sales Director, has noted in a written statement.

"In short, tonally, if rosewood and maple were to have a baby, it would be Myrtlewood. You get all of the accentuated clarity in the high notes without the chime as well as the dynamic presence in the low end."

The cost of the Breedlove Concerto, built in Bend, Oregon, is \$1,799/street. **AG**





Martin  
Dreadnought Jr.Guild  
Jumbo  
JuniorTaylor  
GS Mini

# Tiny-Guitar Nation

**3 biggies in the acoustic-guitar market—Guild, Martin, and Taylor—are offering scaled-down, more affordable versions of their popular axes**

BY PETE MADSEN

**H**eads up, tiny-house nation—’tis the time of the tiny guitar. Scaled-down is the new “bigger is better,” a design aesthetic for guitars that are easy to transport, gig-ready, and quite attractive. These days, modern guitar players value portability in addition to tone, playability, and visual aesthetics, and the industry is responding with compact acoustic axes that travel easily, accommodate players with small hands or ergonomic challenges, fit into cramped living spaces, and suit modest budgets. And most mini and junior models come equipped with either a pickup system or you can easily have one installed. Of course, travel guitars are not a new concept; they’ve been around for decades, but the idea of major manufacturers scaling-down their prized products is fairly new.

These days, three of the biggest American guitar manufacturers—Martin, Taylor, and Guild—are producing high-quality, scaled-down versions of some of their most popular models. Here’s a look at what they have to offer.

## GUILD JUMBO JUNIOR

Do you like the jumbo shape, but not the size? The Guild Jumbo Junior, part of the venerable brand’s Westerly collection, is the most recent entry into this market. It is a short-scale, pared-down version of the Jumbo classic and it plays remarkably well, from the real bone 1 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub>-inch nut to the 14th fret, where the mahogany neck meets the solid Sitka spruce top and arched mahogany back and sides (also available with

maple back and sides). The Chinese-manufactured guitar boasts impressive workmanship. The standard model arrives with Guild’s AP-1 piezo pickup system, with easily accessible soundhole-mounted controls for volume and tone (bass and treble).

So how does it sound? You get more “twang” than “boom” as the scaled-down (23.75-inch scale length) Jumbo Junior accentuates mid-range sparkle rather than big, pillowy bass tones. But within the smaller tonal palette, the Jumbo Junior delivers a good balance between bass and treble strings. I plop myself down on the couch to see how comfortable the Jumbo Junior feels as I play a bit of fingerstyle blues and strum my way through a few Beatles tunes. The verdict? The diminutive size of the Jumbo Junior, in



The Guild Jumbo Junior standard model arrives with Guild's AP-1 piezo pickup system.



The Martin Dreadnought Jr. neck gives you ample space to fret chords and not feel cramped.



The Taylor GS Mini gig bag is the most rugged of the three models reviewed here.

combination with the slim-C neck profile and arched back, make this a comfortable guitar to noodle on whether you're watching TV, playing by the fireside, or wailing away onstage.

#### FEATURES

Solid Sitka spruce top, scalloped X-bracing. 1 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub>-inch bone nut, rosewood fretboard. Guild vintage-style open-gear tuners. AP-1 piezo pickup system. D'Addario Coated Phosphor Bronze Medium strings (.013–.056). Padded gig bag with neck support.

#### OPTIONS

Available with either mahogany or maple back and sides.

#### PRICE

\$555 list, \$399 street

### MARTIN D JR. E

C.F. Martin & Co., which invented the dreadnought 101 years ago, has trimmed down the girth of that behemoth to create the Dreadnought Junior, introduced in 2015. Though smaller, it still plays like a Martin. This is due, in part, to the roomy 1 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-inch nut width, which is what you might expect from a full-sized guitar. Navigating the Richlite fretboard feels natural even though the 24-inch scale is a good inch-and-a-half smaller than a traditional dreadnought. String setup is on the low side, but there are no audible buzzes or dead spots. I play some bluesy runs up and down the neck, which feels silky smooth. The neck gives you ample space to fret chords and not feel cramped. Strumming in first position is comfortable and playing barre chords up the neck also feels natural.

The Mexican-made D Jr. E has that characteristic Martin thump and the brand's rich tone, thanks to the solid Sitka spruce top, and

sapele back and sides. (Also available in all sapele). The result is a slightly diminished tonal spectrum than you would get from, say, a Martin D-28, but you wouldn't expect a big boom from a scaled-down dread, would you? Yet, the D Jr. E has a sweet voice.

The Fishman Sonitone onboard piezo pickup system does an excellent job of reproducing the guitar's acoustic sound. Separate tone and volume wheels mounted in the soundhole make for easy on-the-fly adjustments. This may not be the best guitar for a traditional bluegrass band, but it certainly has a lot of the appeal of a Martin dreadnought for space-challenged pickers or those with smaller hands.

#### FEATURES

Solid Sitka spruce top, solid sapele back and sides. X-pattern Sitka bracing. 1 <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>-inch Corian nut. Chrome closed-gear tuners. SP Lifespan 92/8 Phosphor Bronze strings. Nylon gig bag.

#### OPTIONS

Fishman Sonitone onboard piezo pickup system. Left-hand models available.

#### PRICE

\$799 list, \$599 street (also available without electronics for \$699 list, \$499 street).

### TAYLOR GS MINI

The Taylor GS Mini, which made its debut in 2010, is a smaller version of the company's popular Grand Symphony model (but with a 23.5-inch scale length). It is available with either a solid mahogany or a spruce top, layered sapele back and sides, and an ebony fretboard and bridge that produces a bright, roots-oriented sound. There is the usual Taylor attention to detail and flawless craftsmanship: Frets

are dressed nicely and I can spot no imperfections. The molded back makes for a comfortable contour against my body whether sitting or standing. I flatpick runs up and down the neck and play some fingerpicked prewar blues tunes. The GS Mini responds with aplomb. The punchy bass and crisp treble are present whether I pick hard or with a softer touch. The 1 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub>-inch nut translates into a slim neck design that will be a welcome feature for those with smaller hands and for some fast, fret-busting runs. Our mahogany-topped test guitar sports Taylor's ES2 acoustic pickup system; if you purchase the GS Mini without a pickup system it will arrive with a clip-mount inside the guitar that makes installation of an ES-Go pickup quite easy.

The Taylor hard gig bag features padded straps, a leather handle for vertical carrying, a roomy, zippered pouch for sheet music and other items, stiff foam sides and a dense foam neck support is a welcome addition that should keep up with the rigors of the road, and fit easily into most airlines' overhead compartments—it's the most rugged of the three models reviewed here and sets a high bar for the humble gig bag.

#### FEATURES

Solid mahogany or spruce top. Layered sapele back and sides. X-bracing with relief rout. Ebony fingerboard. Die-cast chrome tuners. 1 <sup>11</sup>/<sub>16</sub>-inch Tusq nut. Micarta saddle. Elixir NANOWEB Phosphor Bronze Medium strings (.013–.056). Taylor's hard gig bag.

#### OPTIONS

A solid koa top and layered koa back and sides, as well as spruce top and walnut back and sides. Left-hand models available.

#### PRICE

\$658 list, \$499 street

**NEW GEAR**

**The dreadnought is the instrument of choice for bluegrass pickers. And it's satisfying to work through some classic G runs on the PK Thompson.**







# A Mighty Guitar

**Preston Thompson makes a killer new dreadnought that draws inspiration from the late bluegrass master Charles Sawtelle**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

The new Preston Thompson guitar arrives, as carefully packed instruments do, mute and with its strings completely slackened. As I twist its Waverly butterbean-knob tuners, it really comes to life. I can sense its great resonance and sonic potential just from hearing the open strings coming up to pitch.

Fully tuned, the Thompson is a dreadnought at its finest. It's got a huge velocity of sound and great clarity, whether strummed or fingerpicked. Its robust but not overwhelming bass notes are the perfect match for its clear and singing trebles. And the more I play the guitar, the better it feels—it seems to start opening up not long after I unbox it.

## PREWAR DETAILS

In his workshop, in Sisters, Oregon, Thompson—along with a small team of fellow guitar makers—builds instruments inspired by prewar classics. The line includes everything from a size-2 parlor to a 000 to a dreadnought. With its mahogany back and sides and Martin Style 18-inspired appointments, our review model, the D-MA, is one of Thompson's least fancy offerings. But it's a formidable guitar. Like all of Thompson's dreadnoughts, it's based on the 1937 Martin D-28 once owned by the late Charles Sawtelle of the bluegrass band Hot Rize. Thompson had the opportunity to scrutinize this famous herringbone dread and to take measurements from it for use in his own designs.

The D-MA boasts an Adirondack spruce soundboard—and a nice one at that, with a lovely reddish coloring and a bit of bear-claw figuring. Other true-to-vintage specs include hand-carved, scalloped Adirondack braces; a dovetail neck joint, hide-glue construction on the body; and a thin nitrocellulose lacquer finish, glossy on the top, back, and sides.

But the D-MA is not a slavish copy. The neck has a traditional soft-V shape, a bit shallower than that on the typical prewar dreadnought. This streamlined profile, coupled with a sleek satin finish, lends the Thompson excellent modern playability.

The craftsmanship of our D-MA is superb, inside and out. The bracing, kerfing, and cloth reinforcement strips are all meticulous, and the body's finish has been buffed to a faultless gloss. And without any adjustments, the setup is perfect.

The frets are impeccably dressed and polished and the slots on the nut and saddle are cleanly articulated. The action is low, but not overly so, and the neck's relief has been dialed in just right.

## A BLUEGRASS WORKHORSE—& BEYOND

Given the D-MA's power—no doubt benefitting largely from its Adirondack top—it's a joy to play even the simplest things on this guitar. The instrument has a quick response and an open voice. Cowboy chords take on an expansive quality, and you can really feel the bass notes vibrating against your chest. Diatonic melodies sound rich and present as well.

The D-MA arrived at an opportune moment; when I received it I was preparing some of the notation for this bluegrass-themed issue, and the dreadnought is, of course, the instrument of choice for bluegrass pickers. It's satisfying to work through some classic G runs on the Thompson. The instrument sounds rich and full even when picked with a light touch—there's an ideal balance between single bass notes and chordal accents, as well as between the open strings and the fretted notes.

The guitar's balance and clarity is particularly evident when I play through national flatpicking champ Scott Fore's arrangement of the traditional tune "Blackberry Blossom." The melody is stated in three different octaves, and the guitar has a consistently strong sound in each one, across all six strings, for both regular and cross-picking. Also, a portion of the melody in the arrangement is negotiated using natural harmonics, and those on the D-MA are brilliant and sparkling.

It's a terrific instrument for bluegrass, but the D-MA responds equally well to in the chord-melody jazz arrangements, country-blues fingerpicking, and other styles. And it sounds just as vibrant in standard tuning as it does in D A D G A D or open C.

It's quite an agreeable guitar.

Priced at \$4,875, an instrument this good doesn't come cheap. But on the other hand, it's much less expensive than a prewar example. Whether for performing or recording, the D-MA would make an ideal go-to guitar for the serious picker: an heirloom-quality instrument that sounds excellent out of the box, and which is sure to only sound better with age. **AC**



## AT A GLANCE PRESTON THOMPSON D-MA

### BODY

Non-cutaway dreadnought size; solid Adirondack spruce top; solid mahogany back and sides; gloss nitrocellulose lacquer finish

### NECK

Mahogany neck; ebony fretboard; 25.4-inch scale length; 1 3/4-inch nut; Waverly tuners; satin nitrocellulose finish

### EXTRAS

Elixir Nanoweb phosphor bronze strings (.013-.056); hardshell case

### PRICE

**\$4,875**  
Made in the USA  
pkkguitars.com

**The Century De Luxe Classic doesn't necessarily feel like an old instrument. In some ways, that's a good thing.**



**AT-A-GLANCE**

**EPIPHONE  
MASTERBILT  
CENTURY  
DE LUXE  
CLASSIC**

**BODY**

17-inch non-cutaway body with 17-inch lower bout; Solid spruce top with longitudinal bracing; Laminated flamed maple back and sides; Aged Gloss Vintage Sunburst or Vintage Natural finish

**NECK**

5-piece maple/mahogany neck; Ebony fretboard; 25.5-inch scale length; 1.69-inch nut; Epiphone reissue tuners

**EXTRAS**

Cleartone strings (.012-.053); eSonic HD Preamp/Shadow NanoFlex HD pickup; Optional Century Collection De Luxe hardshell case

**PRICE**

\$1,499 list/\$899 street;  
Made in Indonesia; [epiphone.com](http://epiphone.com)



# A Modern Classic

**The Epiphone Masterbilt Century De Luxe Classic is an affordable archtop for our times**

BY ADAM PERLMUTTER

There was a time, prior to the advent of amplification, that the acoustic archtop guitar reigned supreme in American popular music. Guitarists in large ensembles relied on these robust instruments for their cutting, projective sound, which stacked up nicely against walls of horn and percussion. In the 1930s, Epiphone—then known as the Epiphone Banjo Co.—offered a full range of archtop models from spartan to luxurious, but phased them out decades ago as they lost favor with guitarists. The company is revisiting its roots with a new line of Masterbilt

archtops, from the diminutive Century Olympic to the big-bodied Century De Luxe. I put the latter model to its paces and was duly impressed by its performance and value.

## OLD-SCHOOL DETAILS

In reviving the archtop, Epiphone had 50 original examples to scrutinize, and borrowed a bunch of classic details for its new designs. The Century De Luxe has a non-cutaway body with a 17-inch lower bout and the same gracefully arched soundboard and back as its 80-year-old predecessors.

The top is made of solid spruce with longitudinal bracing, and other period-appropriate details include Epiphone reissue tuners with marbled crown buttons, diamond fretboard inlays, ornate headstock decorations, and even a replica of a 1930s soundhole label.

Though it has a vintage appearance, the Century De Luxe Classic doesn't necessarily feel like an old instrument. In some ways, that's a good thing.

With its medium, well-dressed frets and

spot-on intonation, the guitar definitely plays better than the average vintage example—the tuners have an 18:1 ratio and are much smoother and reliable than typical 1930s versions. The guitar's finish is what Epiphone calls Aged Gloss, which has more of a modern import vibe than an old-school one, and it seems overly opaque, obscuring much of the figuring on the maple back and sides of our Vintage Sunburst review model. (This wouldn't be a problem on the Vintage Natural version.)

The guitar is heavy—around seven pounds—but is well-built overall. The bone nut and slots of the bone saddle are perfectly executed, and all the binding and inlay work are flush and clean. But there's a little sloppiness in some of the details, like excess glue around the soundhole label, and imperfectly painted f-holes—certainly not deal breakers at this price point.

## VINTAGE-VOICED

The Century De Luxe Classic is great fun to play. Its C-shaped neck is beefy—.95-inch thick at the

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first fret—perhaps too large for a player with small hands, but it feels manageable, thanks, in part, to its perfect low action. At 1.69-inches, the nut is on the narrow side, but the fretboard doesn't feel cramped in the slightest.

The guitar has a winning sound, with the projection and volume expected of a good archtop—more robust, in fact, than an early 1940s Gibson L-4 that I compared it to. It's got a terrific punch, and is great for rhythm work, particularly in the mold of jazz-giant Freddie Green, the longtime Count Basie guitarist.

It really likes to be strummed hard, and it's also responsive to more nuanced chord-melody work. And when I play walking bass lines with chords, the Century De Luxe's impressive, but not overpowering, bottom end is apparent.

It fares just as well for single-note lines, though there's just a touch of brittleness when I dig in on the first string. A good tonal balance and dynamic range also make the guitar good for fingerpicking, whether in standard, D A D G A D, or open-G tuning. Epiphone has certainly



done its homework when it comes to dialing in the sound of an old archtop.

#### PLUG-AND-PLAY


The Century De Luxe Classic boasts a cool, modern upgrade in its electronics package: a Shadow NanoFlex HD under-saddle pickup and eSonic HD preamp, including bass and treble controls and powered by a nine-volt battery. When plugged in, the guitar has a warm and natural sound, and is resistant to feedback at moderate volume levels. Jazz purists, though, might prefer the tone of a more traditional floating pickup, mounted near the neck.


**There was a time, prior to the advent of amplification, that the acoustic archtop guitar reigned supreme in American popular music.**

Vintage archtops can be expensive and delicate. Epiphone addresses these problems brilliantly in the Century De Luxe. With its vintage styling and modern playability, the guitar would compare favorably to a vintage archtop, and its plug-in-and-play technology gives it an advantage when it comes to gigging and recording.

The guitar is perfect for burgeoning jazzers and steel-string players of all styles looking to expand their tonal palettes with the unmistakable sound of a classic acoustic archtop.


*AG music editor Adam Perlmutter transcribes, arranges, and engraves music for numerous publications. Learn more at [adamperlmutter.com](http://adamperlmutter.com).*






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## Amazing Grace

**The Grace ALiX Preamp/EQ/DI is a robust stage-ready package**

BY DOUG YOUNG

**P**reamps are almost required equipment for guitarists who play amplified, providing a critical interface between the instrument and PA system. While there are many acoustic-guitar preamps that can get the job done, choices have been somewhat limited for those who seek studio-ready, no-compromise sound quality. That is until Grace Design decided to step into the acoustic-preamp market last year. Their first offering, FELiX, is a full-featured preamp with dual DI outputs that also packages one of their highly regarded m101 studio mic preamps into a stage-ready package. Now, Grace has followed up with ALiX, FELiX's little brother, designed for those who only need a single-channel preamp.

## FEATURE-PACKED

Like FELiX, ALiX's circuit is based on Grace's m101 studio preamp, but in a robust unit

with controls and a form factor designed for the needs of performing musicians. The controls include gain, with a two-level LED for setting optimal input levels, bass and treble (labeled "Low" and "High"), and a fully parametric midrange. The frequency range of the bass and midrange controls are configurable. The shelving bass EQ can be set to a corner frequency of 125Hz or 250Hz, while the midrange can be configured to cover 70Hz–880Hz, or 670Hz–8Khz. Combined with a shelving treble control at 2Khz and an additional high-pass filter control that doubles as a notch-filter, ALiX offers enough tone-shaping control for almost any need.

On the output side, ALiX provides an XLR balanced DI-out, switchable between mic and line levels, and capable of providing +19dBu—enough to directly drive most power amps or powered speakers—a 1/4-inch unbalanced amp output, and an additional tuner out. The tuner out is always active—a foot-switch mutes the amp and DI-out to allow for silent tuning. ALiX supports a volume control for the amp output, and also an adjustable footswitch-activated boost, which can provide up to 10db of gain to both the amp and DI-outs—great when it's time to solo. Additional features include an effects insert,



ground-lift switch, phase reverse switch, and most importantly, three selectable input impedances for optimizing various pickups.

Grace clearly understands the needs of musicians, and has added a few new twists to ALiX, compared to FELiX. For example, the smaller size makes the ALiX more at home on a pedal board, so ALiX handily includes a BOSS-style 2.1mm jack that provides nine volts at a hefty 500ma—enough to power even the most power-hungry effects boxes, so ALiX effectively can act as the power supply for your pedal board. Although ALiX has no XLR input, the single instrument input supports either a standard tip-sleeve (TS) guitar plug or a TRS plug, and ALiX can be configured to send 12 volts to either the tip or sleeve plug to power an electret mic.

#### STUDIO SOUND ONSTAGE

I played through ALiX into a PA system, as well as my studio monitors, using a variety of pickups, passive soundboard, and both active and passive under-saddle pickups. As expected from both the specs and ALiX's

pedigree, the sound was superb in all cases. ALiX is dead quiet, exceptionally clean and clear, and the flexible and powerful EQ section, along with switchable input impedances, made it easy to dial in a great sound. I especially appreciate the way the high-pass filter allowed me to eliminate the low-end thump from my fingers hitting the strings

#### ALiX offers enough tone-shaping control for almost any need.

with a K&K soundboard pickup. ALiX has a lot of headroom, which goes a long way toward reducing harshness and quacky-sounding spikes that aggressive playing can trigger in lesser devices.

#### DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Although ALiX is straightforward and the interface is clearly laid-out and intuitive, a bit of time spent studying the manual and understanding the signal flow makes it easier

to take advantage of ALiX's more sophisticated features, and can clarify the relationships between the various outputs, the amp volume, and the boost switch. The only issue I encountered with ALiX was that the boost circuit follows the effects insert. This will work perfectly in most cases, but might cause unexpected behavior in others, such as when a looper is placed in the effects loop.

Still, for anyone looking for a single-channel preamp of the highest quality for live performance or as a studio DI, ALiX would be hard to top. The device is rugged, relatively compact, and boasts high-quality audio. Combined with a well-thought-out, feature-rich design, it is a clear winner for acoustic guitar as well as many other instruments. ALiX is not cheap, but this is a case in which you get what you pay for, and ALiX provides some cost savings to those who don't need the features of the dual-channel FELiX.

Grace also expects to release another preamp shortly, with simpler features and a lower price point, creating a line of products to span different needs.

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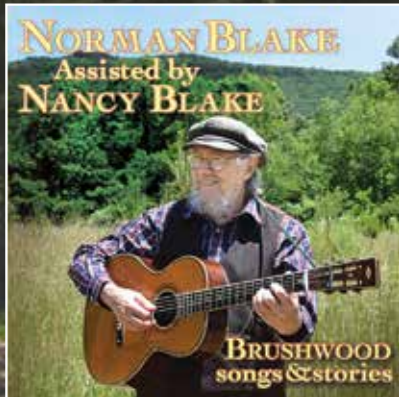
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The Bard gets a  
musical makeover

# MIXED MEDIA



**Norman Blake**

*Brushwood Songs & Stories*

(Plectrafone)



## A Message from Norman Blake

**A thoughtful (maybe) swan song that puts the listener at the feet of the master**

BY GREG CAHILL

On an album that Norman Blake has said might be his last, the folk and bluegrass icon offers a rustic, often poignant collection of blues, rags, and ballads, all original material written over the past two years and steeped in the deep roots of folk-music tradition. The album shows that Blake, now an elder statesman, has a lot on his mind—as heard on two instrumental rags, two spoken-word recitations, and 15 songs, two of which were co-written with his wife and longtime musical partner Nancy Blake, who also provides harmonies on five of the tracks—on songs that often reflect the sense of fairness that informs English balladry.

Blake takes a theatrical turn on the album's opener, the ballad "The Countess of Lola Montez," an homage to the 19th-century

dancer, actress, and courtesan that finds Blake tossing off gentle finger rolls that spill effortlessly from his hands. Like Montez, Blake has turned in his August years to delivering moral lectures. At 78, Blake's voice is craggy, offsetting the delicate sweetness of his fingerstyle work—indeed, his guitar playing is as jaw-droppingly fine as ever. But Blake is more interested in making a statement about the crafty ways of the world than he is in dazzling the listener with his astonishing technique. (He dazzles nonetheless.) For example, he addresses the cruelty of aging and the short-sightedness of society's progress on "How the Weary World Wears Away." He returns to those themes on "High Rollers," an indictment of corporate greed and its impact on "the hungry and homeless" spun in the spirit of Woody Guthrie.

He doesn't mince words: "The Truth Will Stand (When This World's on Fire)" is an apocryphal Appalachian-inspired tale that decries corrupt politicians, Wall Street bankers, and creeping fascism. But he also displays wit as evidenced on the wistful old-timey ballad "Waiting for the Mail and Social Security."

Throughout, Blake extols the virtues of the old ways. If there's a lesson to be taken from *Brushwood Songs & Stories* it's that you should be kind to one another, especially the downtrodden, because time catches up to us all in the end.

In recording *Brushwood*, Blake employed eight mostly vintage guitars (the exception is a 2004 Martin Norman Blake Signature 000-28 B) that included a 1907 Maurer, a 1928 Martin 00-45, a 1933 Gibson LC Century, and a 1937 Gibson J-35.



## Buck Curran

### *Immortal Light*

(Obsolete Recordings/ESP-Disk)

#### Psych-folk guitarist releases an excellent solo debut inspired by a river

For years, the guitarist, singer-songwriter, and luthier Buck Curran has been a fixture on the psych-folk scene, known mostly through his work in the duo Arborea. But it wasn't until recently that Curran stepped out on his own with *Immortal Light*. Just as water has served as a muse for such musicians as Claude Debussy to the Incredible String Band, the Androscoggin River, near Curran's home in Maine, inspired the songs and compositions on this album. In between touring with Arborea in 2014, Curran spent time meditating on the banks of the river, his mind filling with musical and lyrical ideas for the record. There's a water-like flow on *Immortal Light* as Curran navigates the streams of his different benchmarks—the great fingerstyle guitarists like Robbie Basho and Davey Graham, the modes and drones of Indian classical music, and the sound-seeking ways of such adventurous electric guitarists as Jimi Hendrix.

Throughout the album, Curran, who also plays banjo, harmonium, and flute, displays a brilliant ear for uncanny textural and timbral combinations. Together with Arborea's Shanti Deschaine, he also recomposes Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Bad Moon Rising," transforming it in the minor mode while somehow preserving its essence. But Curran's depth as an acoustic guitarist is most evident on the composition "River Unto Sea" and on "Wayfaring Summer (Reprise)." Curran begins the latter piece on the solo guitar in D A D G A D and lets the mournful melody unfold gracefully while exploring his instrument's range of tonal colors.

—Adam Perlmutter



## John Craigie

### *No Rain, No Rose*

(Self-released)

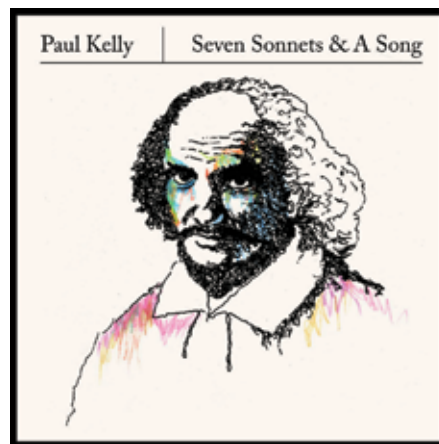
#### Portlander delivers gentle acoustic rock and hushed mountain hymns

With *No Rain, No Rose*, John Craigie delivers the record he always had in him—warm, spontaneous, and centered on the communal values at the heart of folk music. Aided by a baker's dozen of Portland's acoustic-music scene gathered in one room around a single mic, Craigie's songs breathe, bounce, and connect to the heart. Despite the prodigious talent on display, including Niko Daoussis' coiling needlepoint mandolin and the Shook Twins' airy vocals, the rattling strum of Craigie's acoustic guitar forms the spine of these loose-limbed arrangements.

Craigie's gently rocking acoustic guitar threads through the cantering "Broken," which champions the restorative power of humble guitars and shared songs. A cover of "Tumbling Dice" transforms the Rolling Stones' proto-Americana sing-along to a hushed mountain hymn borne on plangent piano and jangly guitar. Craigie even sings about guitars. One vibrates through his neighbor's wall in the Zen-like "Live with Less," while his own strumming radiates and ripples. The titular "Virgin Guitar" intones bright and silvery while Craigie draws a personal philosophy based on making music, old-time religion, and Buddhism modified for the rainy Northwest.

More earthly concerns inform "Bucket List Grandmas," where Craigie's chugging acoustic storms through an alliterative litany of desperate hangers-on. "Michael Collins," a bluegrass barn-burner about Apollo 11 command-module crewman Michael Collins, praises the forgotten astronaut who didn't get to walk on the moon. With wit and empathy, Craigie turns even America's space program into a folksy paean to the working man.

—Pat Moran



## Paul Kelly

### *Seven Sonnets & A Song*

(Cooking Vinyl)

#### An Aussie gives the Bard a much-deserved musical makeover

If music be the food of love, play Paul Kelly. That might not be the exact quote from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, but it's a fitting approximation for Kelly, the Aussie singer-songwriter and acoustic guitarist, who has done what every generation since the 15th century has done: adapted works of Shakespeare in its own image. For Kelly, who's staked his career on unconventional approaches to making art, this is hardly surprising—Kelly released another album shortly after *Sonnets* about ruminations on death, *Death's Dateless Night*, with multi-instrumentalist Charlie Owen. But what is surprising is that no musician has set the Bard's poetry to song before.

With *Seven Sonnets and A Song*, Kelly (quite literally) imbues seven of Shakespeare's sonnets with an unconcealed generosity and a mellow complaisance, as well as a song from the aforementioned play *Twelfth Night*, "O Mistress Mine," and one by Sir Philip Sidney, "My True Love Hath My Heart," with gorgeous vocals by Vika Bull and harmony by Linda Bull. Included are more well-known verses on the first blushes of love, such as Sonnet 18—"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?"—along with, as in "Sonnet 73" and "Sonnet 60," the quiet endurance of a more seasoned romance, "In me thou see'st the twilight of such day." A James Taylor-esque lilt peppers these simple yet enduring love mementos, which are occasionally accompanied by banjo (Alice Keath), pedal steel (Lucky Oceans), and even mellotron (Cameron Bruce), among other instruments. The album is grievously short (clocking in at just under 20 minutes), but you know what they say, parting is such sweet sorrow.

—Anna Pulley



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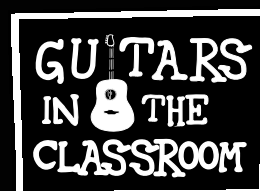


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# 1968 Gallagher G-50

Doc Watson's 'Ol' Hoss' dreadnought

BY TEJA GERKEN

At a time when artist endorsements may change from one day to the next, few guitar companies can look back at a joined history the way Gallagher Guitars ([gallagherguitars.com](http://gallagherguitars.com)) can regarding its relationship with the late-folk icon Doc Watson.

Only three years into his pursuit of building great flattop guitars, company founder J.W. Gallagher introduced himself to Watson at the Union Grove Fiddler's Convention in Watson's home state of North Carolina in 1968. Hoping to get Watson to try one of his instruments, he brought along four guitars, one of which would end up getting Watson to leave behind the Martins and Gibsons he was playing at the time. J.W.'s son and then-president of the company Don Gallagher remembers: "I was putting the body together and had applied too much pressure when I glued the top and back on, cracking one side. Dad fixed the crack, and since this was the only mahogany guitar we had ready to go to Union Grove, he said we could take it to show, but because of the crack we would not sell it. When we were at Doc's house, this G-50 was the one Doc liked. Dad told him we couldn't sell it because I had cracked the side. Doc's reply was, 'Shucks son, I can't see the crack; anyway, it's the sound I am interested in.'"

Featuring a dreadnought shape, mahogany back and sides, and a Sitka spruce top, the G-50 (named for the fact that J.W. Gallagher was 50 years old when he designed it) didn't try to break the mold of traditional guitar design. But it already showed distinctive Gallagher traits such as the original headstock shape and a bridge that's both glued and bolted to the top (with the two pearl dots near the outside bridge pins hiding the bolts' heads). According to Gallagher, this guitar may have also been the first of the company's instruments to feature a truss rod that's adjusted from the soundhole side of the neck, a design that was later adapted by many other makers.

Watson ended up playing this G-50—which he'd named "Ol' Hoss"—until 1974, and it is featured on most of his recordings from this

period. The instrument was replaced with another Gallagher, this time featuring a neck that's based on a Gibson Les Paul. Watson was so pleased with his Gallagher guitars that he suggested that the company introduce a signature model, which remains in production today. **AG**



PHOTOS BY MATT MEECHAM



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